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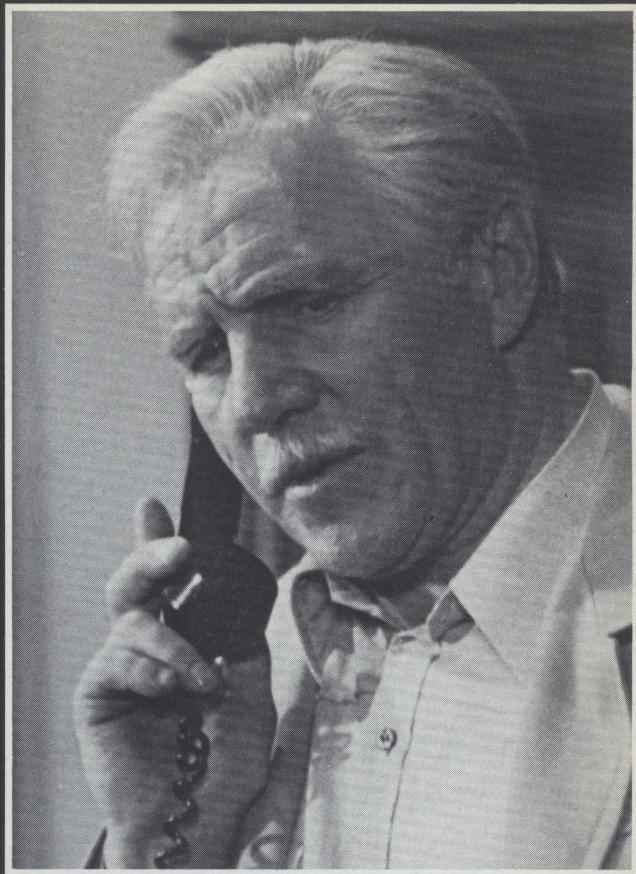
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INTERNATIONAL FILM QUARTERLY · WINTER 1983/84 · VOLUME 53 No 1

SIGHT AND SOUND
is an independent critical magazine
sponsored and published by the British Film Institute. It is not an organ for the expression of official BFI policy: signed articles represent the views of their authors.



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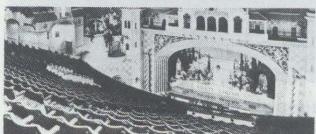
On the cover:
'The Bostonians':
Vanessa Redgrave,
Christopher Reeve,
Madeleine Potter.
Photograph:
Marie Cosindas.

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Birthday party/
The Bostonians/Directors'
conference/Edinburgh
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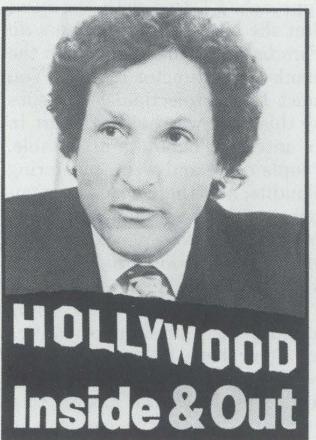
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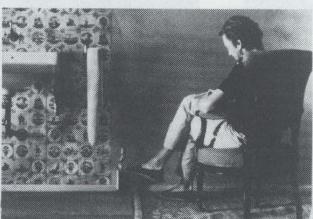
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Birthday party

The BFI at Guildhall

I must confess to a few naughty thoughts on arriving at Guildhall last October for the banquet celebrating the BFI's 50th Anniversary, generously sponsored by Hong Kong's Sir Yue-Kong Pao. How many people would one actually know and who would be one's immediate table companions—friends, enemies, bores? The initial champagne reception started rather demurely as the 700 representatives of British Film and Television, past and present, gathered. Then, gradually, a glittering cast of famous faces began to emerge: players galore, from Gainsborough ladies and Dame Anna Neagle to Jeremy Irons, old documentary directors, a wide range of feature directors, cameramen and editors, Larry Adler, Costa-Gavras, former BFI Directors, some overseas archivists, even that maverick filmmaker, Pierre Puerilescu. First impressions were of a surfeit of men of a certain age—was this a subtle gender comment on the number of women employed in these two powerful media?

A call to arms and we were ushered into the splendid banqueting room filled to the corners with long tables capped by the VIP table trailing across (marked TOP in the souvenir programme), with tablecloths and cutlery gleaming mightily under the added lights of BBC TV, which brought parts of the evening to an estimated audience of over five million. Now followed a slightly comical game of musical chairs as the 700 endeavoured to find their name-cards, jostling and chatting on the way—"I haven't seen you since you got sacked from Rank"—"My God, I thought you were dead."

As anticipated, the experienced Guildhall staff got us through the meal in just over an hour, during which time the BBC had shown *Britain at the Pictures*, a nostalgic compilation of value as a clip-show of British hits over the years but which could have done with more historical facts and analysis. For the evening's official ceremonies, attention was focused on the TOP table where, flanked by politicians of several hues, sat HRH The Prince of Wales, BFI Chairman Sir Richard Attenborough, BFI Director Anthony Smith and guest of honour Orson Welles, a rare catch. Sir Richard's speech about the Institute and National Film Archive (past, present and future) was quick and pointed and he then asked HRH to present the BFI's first six Fellows, elected for the occasion, with their little mementos—small aluminium boxes containing trophies made



At Guildhall: HRH The Prince of Wales, Sir Richard Attenborough, Orson Welles.

from silver salvaged from nitrate films in the Archive. (Further Fellowships will be given from time to time and several of this year's batch will be encouraged to give Guardian Lectures and help the Institute in other ways.)

The first to be called was Marcel Carné, gnome-like and shiny, who beamed all the way to the table and back, despite a tooth abscess which nearly prevented him from attending; Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger also looked jaunty if a little surprised at all the applause. Everyone deeply regretted the absence of David Lean, who was filming *A Passage to India* abroad, and Satyajit Ray, who suffered a heart attack only a few days before the banquet but who is making a slow recovery—their awards were received by Sir Alec Guinness and Marie Seton, Ray's biographer and one of the BFI's longest-standing members. Welles, the sixth Fellow, proposed the toast to the Institute and was splendidly anecdotal. It was wonderful to see the old magician, writ larger than before in all senses, hypnotising that huge assembly in tones more gravelly than ever and winding down to a peroration where every nuance found its place.

Prince Charles, apart from protesting that he was uncertain why he was there, has developed a nice throwaway style for these occasions, likening the company at one point to 'an emergency Equity meeting'. His final task was to present the BFI's new Royal Charter to Sir Richard (a development due in large part to the foresight and imagination of former BFI Chairman Sir Basil Engholm). This changes the constitution of the Institute so

that it is no longer a company limited by guarantee and the members are no longer regarded, rather eccentrically, as the equivalent of shareholders. Otherwise, BFI membership essentially remains unchanged.

The proceedings over, Sir Richard invited everyone to the Library for a final drink and last-minute mingling in which HRH joined and seemingly encouraged everyone to drop protocol and talk to any personality in sight (an enthusiastic BFI staff member approached Carné with the news that she had seen *Les Enfants du Paradis* thirty times, to which the blank-faced director replied, 'You must be a projectionist'). Welles by this time was holding court in an anteroom behind a little table. People came and went, muttering plaudits, and there was a particularly touching reunion with Gordon Jackson, who played Ishmael in Welles' London production of *Moby Dick*.

Personalities were now going round getting other personalities to sign their programmes and everything one overheard and read constituted the answer to a PR man's dream (TV coverage and all)—'the BFI has finally made it', 'a fabulous opportunity to meet old colleagues', capped, perhaps, by Carné's Gallic flourish, 'en souvenir d'une soirée inoubliable.' Even after deducting a layer of showbiz effusiveness, one had to agree. The evening had been neither pompous nor boring; celebratory, of course, but not complacent; a tribute to fifty years work by several hundred dedicated men and women. Let's hope those politicians on the platform were listening well.

JOHN GILLETT

Boston

'The Bostonians' on location

The Bostonians has been on the Merchant Ivory agenda for ten years or more. Ismail Merchant reminds me that we talked about it in an interview in 1973, when James Ivory was already wondering whether the project would be one of those a director carries around with him, finally achieving it with his last, exhausted gasp. Happily, not so. But in 1973, in the wake of the wayward, dazzling *Savages*, it would have been a radical departure for the team. Then, a first venture into period and a classic novel adaptation; now the fourth period adaptation in a row, and Ivory is already saying that his next subject must be a modern one.

In some ways, *The Bostonians* is modern enough: one of Henry James' two great, prescient social novels of the late 1880s (the other, and finer, being *The Princess Casamassima*). The women's movement was already more than a shadow on the horizon. Twenty years or so later, Olive Chancellor would be chaining herself to railings; almost a century on she would be at Greenham Common, with Verena Tarrant still in tow.

Vanessa Redgrave is playing Olive Chancellor, which seems almost inevitable casting until one learns that she stepped into the part only a few days before shooting started. Verena is played by Madeleine Potter, so far a stage and TV actress, and so much younger that there is bound to be some shift in the stresses of the two women's fraught relationship; Basil Ransome by Christopher Reeve, the veteran Miss Birdseye by Jessica Tandy and the plain-spoken Doctor Prance by Linda Hunt, who was the diminutive male photographer in *The Year of Living Dangerously*.

An invitation to visit the Boston location is almost as longstanding as the project. When I arrive, early in October, the nine-week shoot has only ten days to go. They're back in Boston, after expeditions to New York and Martha's Vineyard, winding up in a house in a run-down district (run-down, James Ivory says, virtually from the moment the over-optimistic builders moved out) which belongs to a black welfare organisation.

The ladies of the organisation are apparently much taken with the transformation of their premises—whose virtue for the film-makers is that it has escaped reconstruction, retaining its high ceilings and fine if battered staircase. One room, laid up for a boarding house *table d'hôte*, is incongruous roosting place for a pair of Boston cops, standing by

to halt the traffic when necessary. Upstairs, Walter Lassally's camera squints through a doorway at the infamous Selah Tarrant (Wesley Addy) practising faith healing on a recumbent woman with a bleak New England profile. The parlour is being dressed for the next scene to be shot, involving an irate Olive Chancellor. An unusual, ugly but authentic detail is the heavy black tubing trailing from the gas chandelier. Elsewhere in the house, hair is being dressed, costumes fitted, extras sitting in a makeshift parlour of their own. Outside, an English prop man sweeps the pavement, and a neighbour offers 'a buck, no a pound, no a guinea' if the sweeping is extended to his patch.

The Anglo-American crew is being filmed at work by two other crews: a British team doing a documentary about Merchant Ivory and a BBC unit, who seem at one point to be interviewing in depth a small boy extra. In this startlingly crowded setting, Ivory and Lassally get on with it, quiet and unhurried. Most appealing moment of the day, perhaps, is overhearing one extra, a veteran of *The Europeans*, firmly directing the comportment of her companion as they stand on the stairs for forty minutes or so, waiting patiently for Vanessa Redgrave to swoop by them.

In the evening, rushes of the Martha's Vineyard footage: sea-shore scenes, superbly shot by Walter Lassally in brilliant weather, with Miss Birdseye's parasol fluttering in a strong breeze, Olive standing like a figurehead on a verandah or slumped in despair on the beach. I suggest that the first film-maker bold enough to release, say, a cassette of two or three hours of rushes along with the completed

film could be on to a good thing. It can't only be professional film-watchers who feel the unfailing fascination of these false starts, moments achieved, possibilities opening up.

The next location is exhilarating: a rocky cove, an hour's drive from Boston, where Olive and Verena are to throw a wreath on the waves in honour of a drowned feminist pioneer. Actresses (barefoot, but in trailing white dresses), camera and sound equipment negotiate a scrambling descent, a process recorded by the documentary unit, a unit from a Boston TV station and the video camera of the householder whose garden has been invaded. The first assistant, David Appleton, begins to show signs of wildness: four units is a little too much.

James Ivory has suggested that Vanessa Redgrave, who famously has a mind of her own, may find fault with the wreath she has to throw. But spirits seem high: the two actresses do a weird, fey little dance perched on their rock—their own contribution to the scenario, adapted from a painting they have spotted in one of the Boston collections. And, after a dummy wreath has been chucked rather ineffectually about, a kind of discus throw from Vanessa, not entirely an elegiac gesture, shies the real wreath clear of the rocks. The prop man, true to the thrifty principles of a Merchant Ivory production, swims out like a retriever.

Back to Boston for some evening shooting in an alley on Beacon Hill which is apparently thoroughly accustomed to film crews, since it preserves its gas lamps and very bumpy cobblestones. The inhabitants have allowed the removal of their window boxes (an anachronism for the 1880s) and these are stacked

on the pavement with the rest of the gear. A householder, determined to catch a glimpse of Superman, who is sitting quietly on a doorstep, realises that he has dropped his briefcase in the clutter and tiptoes up and down, babbling helplessly.

The shot is straightforward, looking down the alley as a group of women emerge from a house and say their goodnights on the pavement. But there are carriages and passing extras to fill the background, a fairly complex criss-crossing of movement which is organised rather swiftly once the lighting pattern, supplementing the gas lamps, has been completed. As the little procession of ladies assembles, one notes that the non-professional among them, a writer from Martha's Vineyard, looks the truest Bostonian.

Next morning I encounter the costume designer, Jenny Beavan, in the hotel lift, manhandling empty clothing racks. The costumes, based in a dusty, disused restaurant some blocks away, spend much of their time in transit. She talks of the problem of fitting square-shaped extras; and indeed of achieving 19th century silhouettes with the figures of 1980s joggers. The crew are off immediately to Troy, in Upper New York State, for the last sequence, the great meeting from which Basil Ransome snatches Verena away. Some four hundred extras will be mustered, with the first rows costumed and the back rows instructed to wear dark sweaters, narrow coats and appropriate hats. In the production office, in a hotel suite, Ismail Merchant is whirling about winding up Boston business, before taking a plane to Washington for the opening there of *Heat and Dust*. Next stop Troy.

PENELOPE HOUSTON



Vanessa Redgrave in *The Bostonians*. Photo: Karan Kapoor.

Madeira culture

Directors in conference

When some 160 film directors flew into Madeira in late October 1983 from such places as Algeria, Upper Volta, Venezuela and Thailand, few had any confidence that anything useful would emerge from the first international conference of directors that they were attending.

The first day of the conference was, as one delegate put it, a 'tragedy'. The Dutch and Belgians showed themselves critically sensitive to anything that smacked of ideological posturing. Delegates from Africa and Latin America were certain that everyone else would try to brush under the carpet the issue that most concerned them—the need 'for a restructuring of the world cinema situation so that there is a free flow of information between all parts of the world.' The British directors sat on the sidelines, happier to be seen as freeloaders with a sense of humour than as directors with something important to say.

But when a Portuguese representative rose during the final session to denounce the way the French had stage-managed the show, the mood at the four-day conference had changed. Directors had abandoned their suspicions of each other as they discovered that all shared a common set of problems, and felt a common sense of threat from the development of transnational means of diffusion via satellite, cable or whatever. The charge was not, however, without weight. It was Pierre-Henri Deleau, otherwise organiser of the Cannes Directors' Fortnight, who had engineered the whole shebang with money from the Madeiran government. With its 18-man delegation only equalled in size by that of the Portuguese themselves, the French were able to attend upon all seven commissions that sat during the conference. And France's culture minister Jack Lang alone was invited to address the assembly.

Arguably, though, without the French presence the meeting would have been a less substantial and optimistic affair. That's partly because the concern of the French socialist government to encourage Third World cinema was totally in tune with the demands made at the conference; it's also because French law provides directors with a very high level of protection for their rights. It was something of a revelation that, subject to the passing of a law currently under discussion, every element in the twelve-point declaration of the rights of directors drawn up at Madeira will be

IN THE PICTURE

guaranteed to French directors by statute. The document included a declaration of the director's right to make the definitive cut of his work, to have the terms of his employment laid down in a contract, to see all contracts relating to the subsequent exploitation of his work, to have the right of approval on all distribution deals, and to be paid a percentage of gross revenues.

Some directors, of course, have such rights in practice if not in law, but many do not and there was no doubt that most directors felt the charter broke new ground. Indeed, although such demands are unlikely to send shockwaves through the corridors of the major US studios, Tom Donovan from the Directors Guild of America was one of those who worked hardest on drafting the charter. He commented: 'The creative right which I would love to take back to the US is the final cut. It is something we have been fighting for over a long period.'

The major threat for directors was seen to lie in the danger that, with the development of the new media, their works would be increasingly mangled by distribution middlemen. It was also a concern that new means of diffusion would increase the power of multinational companies, more concerned with products than art, to impose standardised forms of expression. The congress asserted the right of each country to its own means of self-expression. It also declared that research into new forms of narration was 'as indispensable to the furthering of commerce as to the development of art.'

JAMES PARK

Edinburgh

Hovering shades at the 1983 festival

While the sight of Edinburgh stalwart Sam Fuller in the Film House bar was nicely unsurprising, the presence of Watergate mastermind G. Gordon Liddy (promoting *Return Engagement*) somehow seemed a neat sign of the times. In the past, the 'events' which have been central to the Edinburgh Film Festival not only proved important for British film culture, but also gave the festival a uniquely provocative radical edge. Now, differences seem to have been forgotten. When one reads in the introduction to a survey of contemporary Canadian documentary that 'a pertinent issue will... be the question of how far—40 years later—contemporary work in Canada continues to relate to Grierson's social views and concepts of communication', one feels that Barry Norman will not be provoked into hurling the festival brochure across the *Film 83* studio floor.

The problem Edinburgh director Jim Hickey faces, given that the political weight of the late 70s forays into feminism, psychoanalysis, Brecht, etc., is still unfairly hung round his neck, is how to stop the festival becoming a simple consumer feast. Complaints voiced about the 'quality' of the programme are hardly relevant. More important is how what's available is actually presented.

In the case of the Gianni Amelio retrospective, the rhetoric preceding the event was unfortu-

nately not matched by the circumstances in which the films were viewed (several untranslated; the director due to attend but failing to turn up). Thus, one duly noted that a made-for-TV film like *Death at Work* certainly evinced an extraordinary gulf between Amelio's highly developed style, the longueurs of his own script and the paucity of the production values. But the observation was then left floating.

At times, it was impossible to respond to individual films outside the terms of the festival's own past. For example, seeing Fuller's *White Dog* and Lewis Teague's *Cujo* back to back one morning, it seemed arguable that the latter, featuring a rabid St Bernard, was actually the better dog movie. It is certainly more interesting as a family-under-threat horror film than the Fuller is as a film 'about' racism. It's misleading to reduce *White Dog* to an issue in this way, but it does match some brilliantly handled scenes with some cringingly direct speechmaking. *Cujo*'s concerns, by contrast, are never articulated, emerging instead from the way Stephen King's source novel has been pared down. The fact that the film is as well directed as the Fuller is largely beside the point. *White Dog* was being celebrated as both a suppressed work and a film by an Edinburgh hero. To vote for *Cujo* in this context seemed almost sacrilegious.

Given this sense of Film House being haunted, it was perhaps appropriate that Ken McMullen's *Ghost Dance* should have proved such a pleasant surprise among the new British independent work. It was striking not so much for its originality (it is clearly heavily influenced by Rivette, a sort of *Céline and Julie Go Ghost Hunting*) but for its stateless sense of play. Trailered with quotes from Freud, Trotsky and Jacques Derrida (who appears in the film, effectively playing Godard), the movie's ideas, filtered through two women fleeing the past but mixed up with ghosts, produced a refreshingly open sense of narrative, easily able to accommodate both a Derrida lecture and a very funny performance by Robbie Coltrane (another Film House ghost!) as a man terminally obsessed with weather reports.

Likewise, Mick Eaton's *Frozen Music* offered a strikingly witty and engaging 'reading' of the Albert Memorial, in which this 'monument of pure signification' was subjected to a semiotic and psychoanalytic deconstruction. A line describing the catalogue for the Great Exhibition as 'the A to z of commodity fetishism' encapsulates the film's theoretical and humorous bite. Unfortunately, works like Alan Fountain's *Family Fragments* and Joanna Davis

and Mary Pat Leece's *Bred and Born*, linked by their concern with family relationships, seemed hopelessly overdetermined by their own sense of theoretical integrity. Their diverse anti-pleasure strategies (a distorted hangover from the Brecht event?) seemed narcissistic and self-congratulatory, cancelling out any possibility of engaging the spectator.

Not that the pleasures to be found elsewhere were unproblematic. In particular, 1983's anti-nuke film, Diane Orr and C. Larry Roberts' *SL-1*, while ostensibly a piece of investigative journalism into an accident in 1961 at a nuclear reactor, turned into a hallucinatory melodrama. Treated footage and the reconstructed voice-over thoughts of the man who may have deliberately caused the 'accident' (combined with a haunting Brian Eno music track) caused the ostensible subject virtually to disappear. All in all, very un-Griersonian...

STEVE JENKINS

3D

Will the comeback continue?

The first 3D boom in 1953 and early 1954 produced an astonishing 80 feature films, before vanishing as quickly as it blew up. Since then, 3D films have been only an occasional novelty in cinemas, despite an expectation that at some future date, with improved techniques, they could become universal. Now the pattern is being repeated with the first of a new wave of 3D films bringing substantial box-office returns.

There were two main reasons for the collapse of the 50s boom: the poor quality of many of the films, and projection difficulties on release. The films had to be run through two projectors in perfect synchronisation and the images matched for focus, brightness and framing. In first-run houses a good picture was usually presented; but on the circuits problems arose because of inadequately trained projectionists. The chief difference in 1984 is that both the left- and right-eye twin stereo images are now printed on a single film, and only one projector is needed. The wide-screen format (unknown in 1953) has become popular, and it was realised that two frames of Scope proportions will fit neatly within a single full-height 35mm frame, one above the other.

What is better for theatres, however, is not necessarily better for audiences. A special 3D mirror unit, or set of prisms, has to be used in front of the projector to catch the two pictures and swivel them into superimposition on the



Ghost Dance: Leonie Mellinger, Pascale Ogier.

screen. These projection units are not always of the highest quality: low-grade mirrors destroy sharpness of definition; and if the units are too small vignetting of the picture results. Installing the units is also tricky since any misalignment gives unbalanced illumination and uncomfortable viewing. Picture brightness is another bugbear. One projector has half the light of two, and half the light again can be lost in the mirror unit. The biggest advantage, however, of single-film 3D is the elimination of any unsteadiness between the two images.

The 1953 3D releases were often poorly scripted, low-budget pictures, rushed into production and reliant on gimmick shots. Arrows, assegais, flaming torches, boulders, anything that came to hand was hurled into the audience. Later, better quality films such as *Miss Sadie Thompson*, *Kiss Me, Kate* and *Dial M for Murder* made use of 3D for enhanced realism; but by this time audience enthusiasm had waned and many were released in 2D only.

History appears to be repeating itself today. Good returns from the first small-scale, gimmick-laden features such as *Comin' at Ya* and *Parasite* led to Paramount's investment in a further sequel, this time in 3D, to its moneyspinning horror picture *Friday the 13th*. Once again, the films are filled with airborne objects; though some sort of award for unexpectedness must go to the scene in *Friday the 13th, Part III* in which the axeman squeezes a victim's head until, in close shot, his eyeballs fly out towards the camera. The first high-budget picture, *Jaws 3D*, has recently opened in Britain, and for the time being the boom continues, with some thirty films in all either produced or announced.

Production of these single-film 'over-and-under' 3D movies takes two forms: they can either be shot directly in over-and-under format; or they can be shot on twin-strip and later printed on to a single film. Both systems were used in *Jaws 3D*. The former is obviously cheaper and is more commonly used at present; but the prismatic camera attachments are only just coming into production and have certainly not yet been perfected. The attachments so far are all built with fixed interaxial spacing between the taking lenses. This is another limitation on production quality. Creative control of the 3D image shape requires variable interaxial separation (as was available in the special cameras constructed for the later and better films of 1953) and an understanding of the theory of stereoscopic image placement.

So does 3D the second time round have any real future? Audiences cannot be expected to pay

to see a mere optical trick; the quality of the picture must be equal to any 2D film, with the 3D an added factor. It looks as if it is going to depend on the success or failure of *Jaws 3D*. Big profits would lead to more producers putting their money into 3D productions; and this would bring refinement of the single-film production processes. At the moment, it must be said, the prospects don't look too promising.

CHARLES W. SMITH

Tanner's White City

'Are you still making Free Cinema?'

Alain Tanner was briefly in London last autumn, en route from the film festival in Venice, where he was on the jury, to the one in New York, at which his latest film, *In the White City*, was in the programme.

In the White City, which he describes as 'about time and space, not about the problems of a particular man,' is a Swiss-Portuguese co-production, and apparently came about more or less by chance, as a result of his acquaintance with the producer Paolo Branco. Tanner recalled the experience of working in Lisbon as a remarkably happy one. 'I spent four months there and found an extraordinary absence of arrogance and aggression. When we were shooting in those narrow streets, there would be parked cars which we needed to have moved. We didn't even have to ask... people volunteered to move their cars, called out to their neighbours, and in five minutes there wasn't a car left. You wouldn't find that in any other city—quite the opposite.'

The film's dialogue is spoken in several languages, as the logic of the situation dictated. There is, Tanner says, no 'international' version. 'I insisted it couldn't be dubbed. I even imposed that on the Italian distributor. The Italians want to dub everything, but they have been showing it in Italy with subtitles and it is doing rather well.' Dialogue was improvised by the director from sequence to sequence. 'I wrote it at the last moment, while the technicians were preparing the shot. I wanted to be inspired by the people and circumstances, even the light, of the moment we were actually working.' There was no script as such. 'Just a three-page outline, but I never even looked at that. When you don't work in a studio, it's no good to have a detailed shooting script: it's paralysing.'

'I like to start with quite precise visions in my head,' Tanner adds, 'but in the filming have the



Alain Tanner (right) in Lisbon.

capacity to adapt them to what is actually there in front of the camera. To me, this is where the real moment of creation exists. It's the filming itself, you know, which is really the thing.'

Did the editing stage alter his conception? 'No, not really. Essentially, for *In the White City* there wasn't more material shot than is in the film. Since I often do lengthy shots, which are sometimes a whole sequence, I can't, as they say, correct it in the editing. But of course the editing is important: I think that the longer a shot is, the more vital it is to find the exact frame to cut it. If you make a film with a thousand shots in the classical way, you can give it to a good professional editor and he will be able to put it together for you. But with my film, he wouldn't know what to do about it. To give you an example: there's a shot of a curtain being ruffled by the wind—no camera movement, nobody in shot, just the open window and the curtain. The shot lasts eighty seconds—very long. But what's time in the cinema? This eighty seconds probably represents a whole afternoon. If I gave that shot to a traditional editor, he might take three seconds and say that's quite enough. But with my editor (Laurent Uhler) it took us a long time to decide: was ten seconds too long, or was a minute too short?'

Tanner's beginnings in the cinema were in London, when he collaborated with Claude Goretta on the Free Cinema short *Nice Time* (1957). How did he feel now about that period? 'You know, it's strange, I walk the streets of London now, and all that seems so long ago—a century ago. It's a good memory but with a touch of sadness. Free Cinema seems so remote and it hasn't really, as it wanted to, changed things all that much.' He laughs. 'I saw an Australian film at Venice which was like a copy of the Rank films of

the 50s—so what's the point of having the 60s in between? All the same, it was very creative, the way people were trying to make new images of Britain. I was lucky to come to England at that moment, because there really was a spirit in the air. Every once in a while I meet Lindsay Anderson, and he always asks me, "Are you still making Free Cinema?" And I always say yes. Because I'm still trying to make films the way I want, not to enter the "film business" and work on projects everybody else can do and probably do better than I can. I'd rather stop working than just make standardised commercial films, where the producers and distributors want to "see" the film before it's made. Once you have a completely scripted story and a cast, they've "seen" it, so that the job of the director becomes that of a kind of building site foreman, someone who can shout louder than the others and put the thing in a can.'

TIM PULLEINE

Venice festival

Bergman the true hero

It was unfortunate for Gian Luigi Rondi that the famous names he produced, at a late stage and out of comparatively thin air, for the 1983 Venice Festival's competition delivered less than their reputations might justly have demanded. But Bernardo Bertolucci and his jury of fellow auteurs were perhaps a little disingenuous to complain privately that the wrong films must have been selected. Any reasonably experienced critic could have told them that festival competitions nowadays produce more dross than gold. But, on the whole, the jury did its job well, and its refusal to parcel out the prizes territory by territory, thus giving France the lion's share of Lions, was at least a step away from the usual political caravans.

Still, even if the competition disappointed, Venice's huge ancillary programme did manage to produce a good few golden moments—many of them culled from the first complete showing, at 340 minutes, of Bergman's *Fanny and Alexander* which, thus fleshed out, has surely got to be accorded the status of a master work. A mellow Bergman, bowing graciously to the applause as if quite certain that the Golden Lion had gone to Godard only by default, announced that *Fanny and Alexander* was definitely his last film—only to be instantly contradicted by the representatives of Gaumont, insisting that he had virtually promised to make *Tales of Hoffmann* for them. We shall see.

Then, of course, there was

IN THE PICTURE

Woody Allen's *Zelig* and Cukor's uncut *A Star Is Born*, the former determined to turn time graciously on its head, the latter looking pretty well ahead of its period. One hopes the jury renewed its corporate faith with these out of competition delights. But even if they didn't, Godard's spikily amusing and very beautiful *Prénom, Carmen* proved a worthy enough prize-winner. So too did Euzhan Palcy's *Rue Cases Negres*, the charming and popular Martinique first feature which won the debutante Lion.

Rondi, whose last Venice collapsed in chaos about him, could reflect that most things had gone well thanks to the superiority of his organisation. Even if the English translations at both the Sala Volpe and the Sala Grande sounded as if he wanted to help invent a new language called Itanglais, at least they were there. And there were very few other points the huge assemblage of journalists and delegates could fairly grumble about. Considering the time available to him, Rondi did extraordinarily well.

Godard's Golden Lion was a bit in the 'Well, it's about time he got one' category. *Prénom, Carmen* was at least superior to the new Resnais, more open to a first viewing than the Kluge and more cinematic than the Altman. These were said to be the only other possibles, since Wajda's *A German Love Story*, with Hanna Schygulla in her most fidgety form as a married woman who has a forbidden affair with a Pole in wartime Brombach, was generally regarded as well below par.

Resnais' *La Vie Est un Roman*, already a failure in France, may yet be revalued upwards. But its mixture of three stories, umpteen ideas and a Gallic humour of the kind which left most people wondering whether a joke was intended at all, is not easy to come to terms with. Nor, without a lot of effort, is Kluge's *The Power of Emotion*, which carries on where *The Patriot* left off but with noticeably less beguiling visual flair. If Resnais seemed to be attempting a latter-day version of *As You Like It*, in which a rich aristocrat attempts to construct a temple of happiness in the forest of Ardennes, Kluge takes as his initial text 'all emotions believe in a happy ending'. He then proceeds to suggest that most emotions are false, which inevitably leads to unhappy endings. Godard, on the other hand, clearly views Carmen's careless pursuit of happiness, during which she robs a bank in order to finance a film and in so doing falls for a security guard, as typical of modern youth, totally unaware of its effect on others.

This may seem an odd moral to take away from a Godard film, and it clearly isn't the only one,

since he also talks about films being simply another useless adjunct of the consumer society because that is what we have made of them. But the fascinating thing about the film is the way he presents himself as Carmen's dotty uncle, locked up in a mental institution and doubtful even about lending his apartment to the girl for the making of her epic. It is actually a very funny performance, defiantly self-deprecating, as if he is the last person to treat himself seriously any more.

Another distinguished director who got nowhere in the competition section was Kon Ichikawa, whose *The Makioka Sisters* was at least an advance on some of his recent work, without touching the heights of *Alone in the Pacific* and *The Burmese Harp*. This adaptation of a well-loved Japanese novel starred four of that country's best actresses and strayed into the realm of superior soap opera for which a dreadful Westernised score did its darnedest. But it may look better with good English subtitles and is by no means a negligible exercise.

The Italian films on display did not make it look as if a renaissance was on its way, and especially not Fellini's *And the Ship Sails On*, an allegory about human stupidity that is essentially as frail as its director's talent for intellectual profundity. Even its set-pieces disappoint, like a half-hearted reworking of old ground that once pleased. And poor Freddie Jones, dubbed to the back teeth as the story's

journalist-commentator, can only frantically signal for attention. Of course, the Cinecittà sets are lovely, and there is a nice moment when the passengers on board the cruise ship remark that the moon looks almost as if it were a painting. But even the splendid sequence which has distinguished singers trilling away to the appreciative plebs in the boiler room looks a little patronising. It is as if the story, which has a posse of arty alumni travelling to the island where the ashes of a famous diva are to be scattered and (since this is the eve of the First World War) being embarrassed by having to pick up a group of Serbian castaways, has somehow lost its centre amid a plethora of animated detail.

DEREK MALCOLM

Boris Godunov

Tarkovsky stages his first opera in London

If the recent Covent Garden production of Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov* was something of a triumph, it was due to a triumvirate of talents working closely together: Claudio Abbado (conductor), Andrei Tarkovsky (producer) and Nicolas Dvigubsky (designer). Conducting from memory, Abbado obtained a performance of steely concentration and majestic sound from a Covent Garden Chorus and Orchestra enriched by a firm bass line and

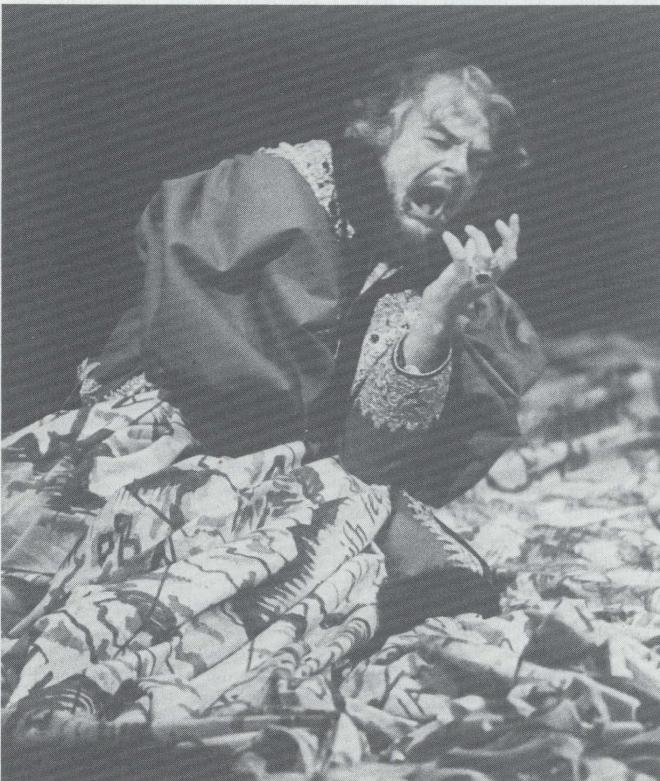
justified, once and for all, the use of Mussorgsky's original edition, without the later embellishments from other hands. The stark contrasts of this text eminently suited Tarkovsky's conception of the opera as a kind of historical rite, a battlefield for dark passions between the rulers and the ruled. All this was played out on a single standing set transformed by lighting and a few props from scene to scene—a ruined courtyard with suggestions of battlements, a huge staircase running up the outside and a pit where the peasants scrabbled up on their knees or, in the Polish scene, watched silently as the gorgeously garbed courtiers launched into their polonaise.

Occasionally, there were touches of the 'Mosfilm spectacular'—rather obvious formations of boyars into columns through which the principals passed, irritating puffs of smoke, and some rather awkward peasant galumphing towards the end. The strength of the production, however, lay in the quieter moments and those scenes where the singers were obviously being shaped into giving 'close-up' performances. In the third scene, Boris and his family are discovered on a huge carpet-tapestry of Russia which rises majestically to a pillar placed far back, culminating in a terrifying moment when Boris, seeing the spectre of a dead child, clutches and wraps the carpet around him. A huge clock pendulum at the back plus soft gongs and women's voices off-stage add an almost supernatural tone to these early scenes.

Robert Lloyd as Boris gave an intensely musical performance (although his voice lacked that 'black' quality which is needed at times) and managed to look rather like Cherkasov in *Ivan the Terrible*, a point presumably not unnoticed by Tarkovsky in some of his stage movements, with characters placed virtually on the prompt box for their big solo scenes. Lloyd really came into his own in the death scene, staged by Tarkovsky with a mounting sense of delirium, as Fyodor the son rushes forward to his collapsed father, embracing and then pushing him towards the throne which finally capsizes over them.

The last scene of all offered perhaps the quintessential Tarkovsky image (i.e. visionary and baffling at the same time). The Pretender leads his followers off towards Moscow, the peasants collapse into prostrate groups and the Simpleton (his head obscured by a rough sack) intones his famous prophecy of woes to come. The stage darkens, snow begins to fall, the Simpleton turns his back to the audience and only then removes his headdress... and the marvellous score peters out on a low bassoon.

JOHN GILLET



Boris Godunov: Robert Lloyd.

1983

Obituary

NOVEMBER 1982: (Victor) Lima Barreto, Brazilian director whose *O Cangaceiro* had some European success in the mid-50s; Bob Kelljan, director of the *Count Yorga* films; Steve Gordon, promising writer/director of *Arthur*.

DECEMBER 1982: Marty Feldman, gargoyle-faced comic; Roy Webb, house composer at RKO; Jean-Jacques Grunewald, composer of scores for Bresson and Becker; Dwight MacDonald, wide-ranging writer and film critic of *Esquire*; Jack Webb, deadpan actor/director of the terse *Dragnet* and the more expansive *Pete Kelly's Blues*; Gene Moskowitz, 'Mosk', Paris-based writer for trade paper *Variety*; Sol C. Siegel, producer, notably at Fox in the 50s (*Panic in the Streets*, *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*).

JANUARY: Dick Emery, British television comedian who translated to the big screen relatively successfully in *Ooh... You are Awful*; Harriet Parsons, producer of distinction (*I Remember Mama*, *Clash By Night*); Sheppard Strudwick, specialist in playing weak-willed characters (*All the King's Men*, *The Reckless Moment*); Robert Carson, scriptwriter (the original *A Star Is Born*, *Across the Pacific*); George Cukor; Michael (Pat) Bilson, for much of the picture the man inside *E.T.*; Louis de Funès, star comedian in France.

FEBRUARY: Lucienne Bogaert, theatrical French actress (*Le Corbeau*, *Les Dames du Bois de Boulogne*); Reginald Denham, British director of the 30s (*Death at Broadcasting House*, *Lieut. Daring*, *RN*); Marion Nixon, sweetly innocent leading lady of the 20s and 30s (*Hands Up!*, *Doctor Bull*); Charles Bluhdorn, business tycoon whose assets included Paramount Pictures; Wally Veevers, director of special effects (*2001*, *Superman*); Tennessee Williams.

MARCH: Sir William Walton, cinematically most noted for the Olivier films he scored; Faye Emerson, Warners player of the 40s with a strong line in dangerous ladies (*The Mask of Dimitrios*, *Nobody Lives Forever*); Maurice Ronet, actor of great skill (*Le Feu Follet*), occasional director (*Le Voleur de Tibidabo*); Serge de Poligny, director of *Le Baron Fantôme*, *La Soif des Hommes*; James Hayter, roly-poly star of *The Pickwick Papers*; Walter Reisch, Viennese-born writer who fled from the Nazis to England, where he directed *Men Are Not Gods*, then to Hollywood, co-scripting *Ninotchka*, *Model and the Marriage Broker*.

APRIL: Mari Kuttna, Anglo-Hungarian writer on films; Lamberto Maggiorani, non-professional actor, the father in *Bicycle Thieves*; Aleksander Scibor-Rylski, Polish scriptwriter (*Man of Marble*, *Man of Iron*) and earlier director (*Their Everyday Life*); Gloria Swanson; Kenyon Hopkins, American composer (*Wild River*, *Lilith*); Dolores Del Rio, actress in Mexico and Hollywood (*Journey into Fear*, *The Fugitive*); Pierre-Richard Wilm, leading man in Feyder's *Le Grand Jeu*, *La Duchesse de Langeais*; Elisabeth Lutyens, eclectic composer of assorted documentaries and British horrors (*The Skull*, *Psychopath*); Walter Slezak, the Nazi in Hitchcock's *Lifeboat*; Buster Crabbe, serial king, portrayer of Tarzan, Flash Gordon and Buck Rogers; Selena Royle, motherly character actress, (*Moonrise*, *The Heiress*); Bronislau Kaper, composer (*Lili*, *Lord Jim*).

MAY: Joseph Ruttenberg, MGM cinematographer (*Random Harvest*, *Somebody Up There Likes Me*); Sidney Skolsky, showbiz columnist, occasional producer; Shuji Terayama, Japanese director (*Pastoral Hide and Seek*, *The Fruits of Passion*); John Williams, British actor, active in Hollywood, adept at portraying kindness (*Dial M for Murder*, *Sabrina Fair*); George Bruns, Disney staff composer, responsible for the *Davy Crockett* song; Sydney Box, writer/producer, often in collaboration with his wife Muriel (*The Seventh Veil*, *Holiday Camp*); Joseph Leytes, peripatetic director, with work in Poland (*Wild Fields*), Palestine (*Faithful City*) and Hollywood (much TV); Burnett Guffey, cinematographer, proficient in black and white (*From Here to Eternity*) or colour (*Bonnie and Clyde*); Fay Spain, lively starlet with some interesting roles circa 1960 (*God's Little Acre*, *Hercules Conquers Atlantis*).

JUNE: John Trent, Canadian director (*Sunday in the Country*, *Middle Age Crazy*); Ivan Tors, producer of children's films (*Flipper*, *Clarence the Cross-Eyed Lion*) and of TV series *Sea Hunt*; Daniele Amfitheatrof, Russian-born composer, with credits stretching from *La Signora di Tutti* to *Major Dundee*; Norma Shearer, noted as much for being the widow of Irving Thalberg as for her performances (*Romeo and Juliet*, *Marie Antoinette*); Wilfrid Shingleton, production designer (Polanski's *Macbeth*, *Heat and Dust*); David MacDonald, British director (*The Bad Lord Byron*, *Christopher Columbus*); Jonathan Latimer, author of super-tough crime novels and prolific scriptwriter, especially for director John Farrow (*The Big Clock*, *The Night Has 1000 Eyes*).



Above: George Cukor, Joan Hackett, Ralph Richardson.

JULY: Charles G. Clarke, cinematographer, from the 20s (Ford's *Four Sons*) to the 60s (*Flaming Star*); Harry James, band leader with various cinematic guest appearances to his credit, who as a trumpeter dubbed Kirk Douglas' playing in *Young Man with a Horn*; (Alexander) Fu Sing, Hong Kong martial arts star; Ross MacDonald, crime writer whose character Lew Archer was twice played by Paul Newman; Eddie Foy Jr, specialist in portraying his father, but an amusing performer in his own right (*The Pajama Game*, *Bells Are Ringing*); Samson Raphaelson, playwright and scriptwriter (*The Jazz Singer*, *The Shop Around the Corner*); Byron Kennedy, Australian producer of the *Mad Max* films; Preston Ames, MGM art director, often for Minnelli (*An American in Paris*, *Gigi*); Darrell Silvera, set decorator (*Citizen Kane*, *Cheyenne Autumn*); Georges Auric, prolific composer, with scores for Cocteau on one side of the Channel and for Ealing comedies on the other; Jerome Moross, composer (*The Big Country*, *The War Lord*); Luis Buñuel; Raymond

Massey; David Niven; Howard Dietz, publicity executive, credited with devising MGM's Leo the Lion trademark and lyricist working mainly with composer Arthur Schwartz (*The Band Wagon*, *Torch Song*); Lynn Fontanne, Broadway superstar with husband Alfred Lunt, though they played the leads in only one sound film, *The Guardsman*.

AUGUST: Peter Arne, sinister British supporting actor (*Danger Within*, *Straw Dogs*); Carolyn Jones, striking actress from the 50s (*Bachelor Party*, *King Creole*) who found biggest success in TV series *The Addams Family*; Judy Canova, pan-mouthed hillbilly singer-comedienne from radio, who starred in a few pictures in the early 50s (*Oklahoma Annie*, *Carolina Cannonball*); Satsuo Yamamoto, Japanese director, noted for his postwar pro-socialist dramas (*Vacuum Zone*, *Street without Sun*).

SEPTEMBER: Ellie Lamberti, leading lady of early Cacoyannis films (*Windfall in Athens*, *A Matter of Dignity*); LeRoy Prinz, choreographer for Warner musicals of the 40s (*Yankee Doodle Dandy*, *Night and Day*) and director of many short subjects; Frank Woodruff, director of some modest RKO programmers (*Cross Country Romance*, *Lady Scarface*); Ben Carruthers, the brother in *Shadows*, later typecast as all-purpose villain; Tino Rossi, star tenor of French films in the 30s.

OCTOBER: Joan Hackett, actress who had too few opportunities to demonstrate her skill and warmth (*The Group*, *Will Penny*); Sir Ralph Richardson; William Hornebeck, editor for Sennett in the 20s, Korda in the 30s and on the *Why We Fight* series during the war; Pat O'Brien, screen Irishman (*Angels with Dirty Faces*, *Some Like It Hot*); Mary Ellen Bute, independent American filmmaker, working in both animation (*Spook Sport*) and live-action (*Passages from Finnegans Wake*); Maxwell Shane, scriptwriter of numerous b-pictures and occasional director (*City Across the River*, *Nightmare*); Norman Cohen, British director (*Dad's Army*, several in the *Confessions of...* series); Otto Messmer, creator in 1919 of *Felix the Cat*.

NOVEMBER: Peter John Dyer, associate editor of *SIGHT AND SOUND*, 1959-62; Herman G. Weinberg, American writer on films; Germaine Tailleferre, French composer (*La Petite Chose*, *Les Grandes Personnes*); John Le Mesurier, abstracted, doleful British character actor; Marcel Dalio, actor from *La Régule du Jeu* and *Casablanca* to *Catch 22*; Lotte Eisner, writer, historian (Lang, Murnau), luminary of the Cinémathèque.

Compiled by BOB BAKER

'The Public has a brain...'

Cinemagoing in Britain, 1984

Robert Murphy

1982 was the worst year ever for cinemas in Britain and there seemed a danger of the whole edifice of exhibition and distribution collapsing. Several of the leading independent distribution houses—Alpha, GTO, Barber International, Entertainment—sought to cushion a precarious existence by moving into video distribution. The majors huddled closer together with the formation of UIP (Universal, Paramount, MGM/UA) and UK Film Distributors (20th Century-Fox and Disney). Thorn-EMI was too preoccupied with its production losses to worry about the continuing decline in cinema admissions but its main rival, Rank, continued to axe unprofitable cinemas in what looked like preparation for a final exit from the industry. And then, with *E.T.*, the tide seemed to turn.

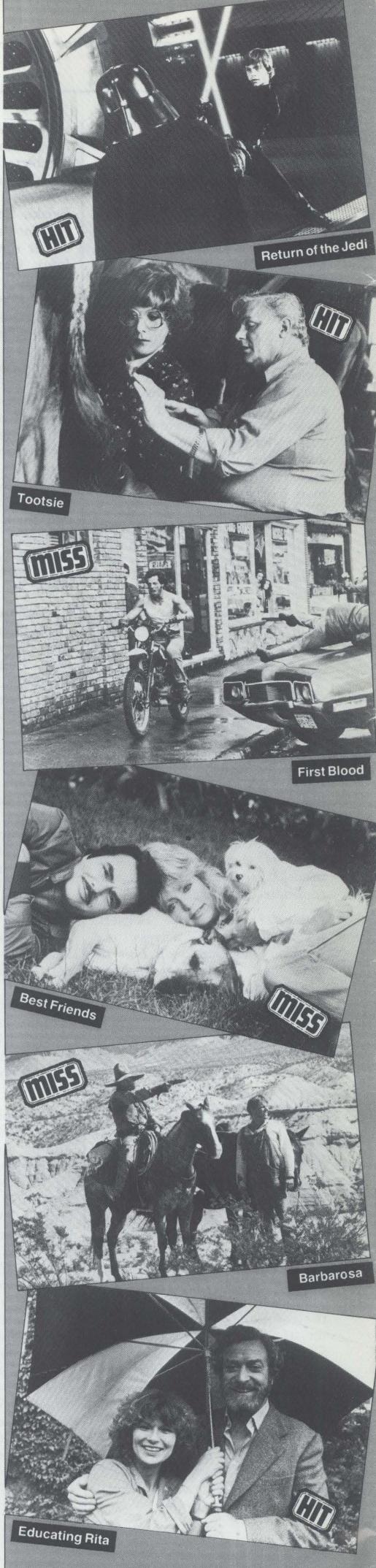
Admission figures for 1983 will definitely be up, though the crisis is by no means over. Without a solid bedrock of support from the habitual cinemagoer, business is unpredictable. According to Stan Fishman, chief booker for the Rank circuit, 'In years gone by you could say, "Even if it's not a big picture it will play to average business and pay the wages until the next big one comes along." Today the brutal situation is that either you have a *Gandhi* or a *Jedi* or an *E.T.* or you're on the floor.' Despite video and video piracy, the long hot summer, the puzzling indifference of the public to films for which great things were hoped, there were a number of times in 1983 when the industry was off the floor.

It was not simply a matter of box-office returns being artificially inflated by the freak occurrence of blockbusters. Until the success of *E.T.* allowed the industry to breathe a collective sigh of relief, there was some doubt whether a blockbuster size audience still existed in Britain. *E.T.* confirmed that it did and the success of *Return of the Jedi*, *Octopussy*, *Superman III* was not unexpected, but there were also some less predictable hits.

After the disappointing performance of *American Gigolo*, Richard Gere's presence hardly seemed to assure *An Officer and a Gentleman* the popularity it had achieved in the USA, and *Tootsie* seemed just the sort of indigenous American movie which was increasingly failing to find a market in Britain. Both films proved immensely profitable, though in marked contrast to some other mainstream American movies. *First Blood* failed to emulate Stallone's *Rocky* movies and only really found its market when released on video. The response to the cycle of American marital problem movies—*Table for Five*, *The World According to Garp*, *Best Friends*, *Man, Woman and Child*—ranged from disappointing to disastrous; while films with country and western associations—*Barbarosa*, *Tender Mercies*, *Honky-Tonk Man*, *Honeysuckle Rose*—plummeted to the sort of oblivion once reserved for worthy British independent productions.

Against the odds, the vogue for respectable British pictures launched by *Chariots of Fire* continued unchecked. *Local Hero*, as the offspring of successful double-bill *Chariots of Fire* and *Gregory's Girl*, was expected to achieve the sort of reasonable returns it did; but the much greater success of *Gandhi* came as something of a surprise to an industry which had repeatedly rejected Richard Attenborough's project as commercially unviable. *Educating Rita*, a straightforward stage adaptation made by unfashionable veteran director Lewis Gilbert, also drew in a much larger audience than might have been expected. Julie Walters' popularity was obviously a major factor, but it is important that the circuits have become adept at dealing with the sort of film—like *Educating Rita* or *Local Hero*—which falls into that ill-defined area between art-house movie and mass audience blockbuster.

As Fishman puts it: 'Because it falls between the two you have to work at it, you have to tap the marketplace, you



have to make people aware of what the film represents and then build it from there.' This often involves long exclusive runs in smallish cinemas. According to Kevin Christie at Fox (which distributed *Chariots of Fire*, *Return of the Jedi* and *Local Hero*), you have to be careful to place a film in the right sort of cinema, where it can run on for a long period. 'People may not come until they've had a recommendation—word of mouth is very important with this sort of picture—and you have to make sure that your film is going to be still there.'

Long (or sometimes not so long) runs of anything from Godard's *Passion* to Coppola's *One from the Heart* have become a marked feature of London's independent art-house circuits. They too have had their big successes—*Yol*, *The Draughtsman's Contract*, *Heat and Dust*, *The Ploughman's Lunch*. Although the commercial market for subtitled films is very limited outside London, accessible English-language films such as *Heat and Dust* have been widely shown on the major circuits.

The problem with several of the British art-house successes—*The Draughtsman's Contract*, *Another Time, Another Place*, *The Ploughman's Lunch*—is that they were made with financial backing from Channel 4 and their theatrical life has been severely curtailed by the rush to put them on television. Though Classic's Stuart Hall, reluctant to turn down films he admires, has given them bookings in his cinemas, he does so in defiance of a CEA ruling against showing films which will appear on television within three years. Channel 4 claims credit for fuelling the revival of British cinema, blames the CEA's lack of realism and appears content with a theatrical 'window' for the more commercial of its films. But the CEA's attitude is supported across a wide spectrum of the industry.

Stan Fishman points out that it is the independents rather than the circuits who are worst hit by early TV screenings, and frustration at television's shortsightedness is widespread. Ian Christie of BFI Distribution insists that the CEA are not antediluvian monsters and that neither they nor anyone else in the industry has any interest in keeping commercially non-viable films (i.e. the vast majority) off the TV screen. He stresses strongly, though, that successful films need their three-year theatrical life. He feels that television companies have to make up their minds whether they are making films or thinly disguised television programmes and points out: 'All the lessons are that those films that do well on TV have had a normal life in the cinema. I cannot think of a case where a film has benefited from being put on television really fast.' (*The Draughtsman's Contract*, for example, drew only an average Film on Four audience, despite its impressive theatrical returns.)

Christie's remarks typify an attitude common to most of the people I spoke to: a defensiveness about the viability of cinema exhibition and distribution coupled with an awareness of the stark necessity for change. As his colleague

Barry Edson pessimistically put it, distribution is traditionally riddled with inefficiency. 'It has been profligate with its own and other people's money. It has been slowly killing itself. It's like a huge animal with self-inflicted wounds which has noticed that there's blood there but is trying to kid itself it's chocolate.'

The dinosaur image persists, but the mainstream exhibitors and distributors are beginning to grasp the consequences of the fact that there is no longer a public which goes habitually to the cinema, that audiences now have to be cultivated. This is something the London independents have known and profited from for some time, creating lucrative art-house cinemas in situations which the big commercial operators found too unprofitable to be worthwhile. It could be argued that they handle the sort of specialised films which can only attract a sizeable enough audience in London. Andi Engel, whose Artificial Eye company has recently expanded from the small Camden Plaza to take over two large, modern Rank cinemas in St Martin's Lane and Chelsea, points out that even in London the location of the cinema is crucial. 'Large parts of the bourgeois audience don't even know where Camden Town is. If we had

'I refuse to believe that the English provinces are inhabited by cabbages'

shown some of the films we have shown here [at Camden] in Covent Garden or Chelsea we could easily have got in 50 per cent more people.'

But he blames the business rather than the public ('I refuse to believe that the English provinces are inhabited by cabbages') and insists that if cinemas are run properly they can be viable. Romaine Hart, of Mainline, is similarly positive: 'If I wanted to go and open Screens on the Hills and Greens all over the country, I'm sure I could, I'm sure there is a market.' Both insist that the essential ingredient of their success is the care and attention they lavish on their cinemas. According to Engel, 'Anyone who thinks it's anything to do with programming is totally wrong. The real work is getting the cleaners into the toilets; getting the staff to be there on time; seeing that the stocks are in the kiosk. Programming is a piece of cake. The problem is to see that there's toilet paper in the toilet. Really boring details which most people don't care about. But I happen to think that if people are paying £3 or more they have a right to expect certain standards—which after all they have at home for free. We have to compete with people's living rooms.'

The independents are still small

enough to move quickly and flexibly and, though dangerously dependent on their weekly takings, are prepared to try experiments and take risks. Talking to Stan Fishman at Rank, one gets the impression not that the people who run the Odeon circuit are rigid or apathetic but that the brain at the top doesn't fully control the extremities of its unwieldy body. In the 1940s Rank controlled almost 600 cinemas; now they are down to 88 (though with 222 screens). Most of them are large cinemas and the conversions carried out in the late 60s and early 70s created almost as many problems as they solved. A certain amount is being spent on refurbishment and renovation, but Fishman's ideal circuit of 500 to 700-seater luxury cinemas still seems a long way off.

In marked contrast to the almost hysterical hostility aroused by some of his predecessors, Fishman seems to be universally liked and respected. It is not just a matter of personalities. The number of films produced by the Hollywood majors has shrunk drastically over the last few years and there is room on the circuits for any film with a glimmer of commercial potential. Fishman maintains that he'll give trial bookings to anything the distributors offer him and expand out from there if results are satisfactory. Relations between the circuits and the small independent distributors are surprisingly amicable, economic logic apparently overriding any difference in personal taste. According to Joe D'Moraes of Blue Dolphin: 'What they think of your picture is irrelevant. As long as you can convince them it'll make money, they'll give you bookings.'

Companies like ITC and Alpha, which still occasionally handle mass release films, are more concerned about the pressure which UIP and Columbia-EMI-Warner (seven of the most powerful distribution companies operating under two roofs) can bring to bear on the circuits, but there is general agreement that the circuits simply cannot afford to give wide release to a film which fails to attract public interest.

Decline has led the industry to close ranks. As Pete Buckingham of Cinegate puts it: 'This cacophony of criticism against the majors is a big mistake. I don't think you can divorce what happens on the commercial circuits from what happens to the art-house independents. You can't say, "This little sector of the public will keep going to the cinema," because it won't.' Rank now operates a scheme whereby certain of its cinemas set one evening aside for the screening of 'specialised' films—*Diva*, *The Marriage of Maria Braun*, *La Ronde*, *The Tree of Wooden Clogs*, etc—programmed by the BFI. Ian Christie, far from exulting at the demise of mainstream commercial cinema, considers its survival essential. He points out that the circuit of Regional Film Theatres co-ordinated by the BFI survives by mixing foreign and experimental films with a substantial leavening of commercial films: 'Specialised cinemas can operate at very low profit levels, but they

can't survive by themselves. There simply aren't enough of them to secure a regular supply of films—the sort of revenues they generate wouldn't make it worthwhile to release a film in Britain.'

The decline of the cinema is part of a more general turning away from public entertainment—football clubs and public houses are also having a difficult time. The crisis provoked by the video explosion and the foreboding over the potential impact of cable TV has at least served to turn attention away from the specific attractions of the television set towards the rivalry of home-based entertainment generally. In the 30s and 40s, the heyday of the cinema, most cinemas were warmer and more comfortable than most homes. As one satisfied customer wrote in 1929 in the *Kine Weekly*: 'I can sit in a most comfortable chair and see and hear *The Singing Fool*. I can write a letter in the lounge. I can leave my car in the Plaza's private park, all for the total outlay of sixpence.' The Plaza, Watford, one of the new suburban cinemas, was probably more luxurious than most, but local cinemas played a vital part in communal life. Herbert Harvey, manager of the Odeon, Shirley, for example, started a car club among his upwardly aspiring patrons and led them on regular Sunday treasure hunts, picnics and visits to country houses.

Cinemas thrived, but on very low profit margins. In 1934, 1,200 cinemas—around 25 per cent of the total—operated with gross box-office receipts of between £1 and £8 a day (*Kine Weekly*). Exhibitors constantly complained that their prosperity was being eroded by taxation. That 'Instead of encouragement, the government has crippled us, a young industry, virile in development and mature in fine achievement.' Their prosperity was considered so precarious that each new form of popular entertainment—radio, greyhound racing, miniature golf—sent shudders of apprehension through the industry. Radio, under stern educationalist Reith, proved less of a rival than was feared but the mushroom growth of greyhound stadiums in the late 20s caused considerable consternation among cinema owners.

Despite massive unemployment, for most people the 30s was a period of relative prosperity, and if it was only the middle classes who could afford to buy nice homes and labour-saving gadgets, most working class people could afford the few pennies necessary to eat out occasionally at a Lyons Corner House, to shop at the new chain and department stores, to spend Saturday afternoon at a football match, and to have a night out at the cinema. It was the great age of public entertainment and competitive cinema showmanship.

Vigorous competition seems to have subsided with the war. The blackout, limitations on display, the shortage of films, meant longer runs, more repeats and muted showmanship. And yet cinema attendance reached unprecedented heights. It must have been slightly dispiriting with all that money rolling in for

so little effort. Cinemas survived the Blitz very well. Few were destroyed but there was little opportunity for new building. Then from 1946, the peak year (1,635 million admissions compared to 63.8 million in 1982), there was a slow, steady decline. Gradually a shabby demoralisation settled over the cinema.

I can remember accidentally witnessing the last moments of a beautiful old cinema in Islington in the early 70s where Harry Kümel's *Daughters of Darkness* was showing with an obscurely awful exploitation film. The harassed elderly manager, cursing darkly to himself, almost chased out those few remaining members of the audience in his eagerness to close the cinema for ever. Obviously that bond of respect, if not affection, between cinema staff and public had worn away completely, to be replaced by rowdiness and vandalism on the one side, sullen apathy on the other.

The industry didn't quite just lie down and die. The obvious thing to do with cinemas which were too large for the audience they could now hope to attract was to divide them up. Unfortunately, this was done in the early 70s, the tail-end of a period of architectural vandalism responsible for replacing picturesque

the staple diet of cinemagoers have now been largely taken over by video. Alpha, for example, one of the enterprising independent distributors which carved a niche for itself with this sort of product, now releases five or six films a year theatrically, three or four a month on video. In common with similar companies such as Enterprise, Brent Walker and Miracle, they are turning increasingly to specialised quality films—*Come Back to the 5 & Dime, Jimmy Dean, Jimmy Dean* (Alpha), *Heat and Dust* (Enterprise), *Brimstone and Treacle* (Brent Walker), *The Marriage of Maria Braun* (Miracle)—for their theatrical profits. 'Sex,' according to Alan Kean at ITC, 'is dead,' and he now applies the talents he once used to promote *Death Race 2,000* and *The Stud* to Zeffirelli's *La Traviata* and Canada's answer to *Chariots of Fire*, *The Terry Fox Story*.

The circuits too, acknowledge the change. Classic, under canny Israeli exploitation kings Golem and Globus, is busy turning its sex cinemas into art-houses and chief booker Stuart Hall works closely with the small distributors, offering them a showcase for their classier product. With the cinemas making reasonable profits, they were able to plough back £1.5m in the form of renovation and refurbishment in 1983.

Following the switch from Hollywood style spectacles under Barry Spikings to indigenous British production under Verity Lambert, Thorn-EMI have formed a Classics Division to distribute the specialised films they think inappropriate for handling by Columbia-EMI-Warner. No doubt, as well as EMI's own British productions, it will handle titles picked up by their fast-growing video distribution company and films inadvertently acquired in reciprocal distribution deals with foreign (particularly Soviet bloc) countries. But the net result will probably be that the smaller cinemas in the EMI complexes will be used increasingly for showcasing quality films.

At Rank, Fishman values his collaboration with the BFI less for its money-making potential than as a way of getting his managers interested in attracting a new audience. It's a process which he thinks has already been boosted by the success of 1983's blockbusters. The possibility of attracting back the middle-aged 'respectable audience' no longer looks unrealistic. It was parents as well as kids who made *E.T.* and *Jedi* so big at the box office, and *Gandhi* followed *Chariots of Fire* in attracting back people (mine and seemingly everyone else's parents) who had stopped going to the cinema years ago.

Obviously then, people are prepared to go out to see a film they really want to see. But according to Andi Engel: 'That's where the circuits fall down—one week you see a terrific movie, next week you see a piece of crap. They think that's normal. I see that as abnormal because it destroys your audience. If you go to a cinema like the Academy, you never see a bad movie.' I disagree. You won't always see a good movie at the Academy,

'If you go
to a cinema
like the Academy,
you never see
a bad movie.'

if traffic-jammed town centres with urban motorways and desolate shopping precincts; slums with windswept wastelands of high-rise flats. It was hardly surprising, then, that most conversions were shoddy and unimaginative.

Though stories of slapdash projection, spill-over sound from adjoining screens, broken seats, dirty toilets, accumulations of litter are often unfair generalisations, they reflect that disenchantment with the cinema by those who work in them as well as by the public. I worked as a projectionist at a licensed sex-cinema in the mid-70s and in common with the rest of the staff regarded the patrons (or rather the punters) with a mixture of pity and contempt. What could induce people to watch such appalling films in such a lousy environment? It's not an attitude I would want to attribute to most of the people who make a career of cinema exhibition, but the problem of maintaining morale, of getting people to care about the cinemas they operate in what has looked for years like a dying industry, is obviously serious.

Video has resulted in the further depletion of the cinema audience, but in some ways this may not be a bad thing. The sex and exploitation films which for the past decade have been a major part of



The Astoria, Finsbury Park. 'Most cinemas were more comfortable than most homes...'

but you will see a worthy and well-presented movie. And Engel's point is clear enough. You may not like *Heat and Dust* or *Diva* but having seen them you won't feel you've been conned into wasting your time and money.

The popularity of prestige art movies has to be set against the demise of the small American commercial movie. Stanley Darlington at CEW shakes his head sadly over the fate of *Best Friends* and *Tender Mercies*, well reviewed, likeable films. Joe D'Morais at Blue Dolphin curses the film buff's zeal which moved him to distribute *Barbarosa*, an off-beat CinemaScope Western which ITC was prepared to consign to the TV screen.

Alasdair Nicolson and Carol Fisher at Enterprise complain of the time, effort and money they wasted trying to get the public to see *High Risk*, a competent little caper movie starring James Brolin. And Michael Myers glumly relates how he gave up with *Night of the Juggler*—another film featuring the unlucky Brolin—and sold it to television.

None the less, there can be few regrets that the days of creating massive TV advertising hypes around low-quality pictures are over. There is widespread recognition now that the public has to be encouraged not only to see a particular film but once again to regard the cinema as a worthwhile form of entertainment.

This cinema will never be converted into the one above.



As Ascanio Branca of Fox puts it: 'What we have to do is concentrate on giving the public a much better break. We've conned the public for too long—the public is not an animal, the public thinks, it has a brain.'

Though the majors still do massive print runs for their really big pictures—Fox put out 350 prints of *Return of the Jedi*—there is a trend towards a softer and more cautious approach. Fox with *Local Hero*, UIP with *Sophie's Choice*, CEW with *Zelig*, in their different ways each attempted to lead the public gently to the picture rather than thrusting it down their throats, to let word of mouth recommendation help build the reputation of the film. Obviously this sort of strategy is only possible with films which the distributors believe in. Here the injection of new blood in the form of abrasively enthusiastic young companies like Palace, Virgin, Premier Releasing appears crucial. The older distributors are by no means burnt out: Alan Kean's faith in *La Traviata* and Michael Myers' in *Young Giants* is as infectious as Steve Woolley's in *The Evil Dead* and *Merry Christmas, Mr Lawrence*. But it is still encouraging to see young people carving a career for themselves in an industry which many had thought moribund.

There remains the question of whether there will still be cinemas in which to view their films. Andi Engel thinks not. 'There's no question in my mind that the commercial cinema here is doomed—and don't talk about the year 2000. It's finished, washed up, forget it. That I am buying doesn't make a lot of sense in the long run, but it does in the short run. For the next five or ten years I can make money from cinemas. But there's no future for me. My costs are too high. I need a good 2–3,000 people a week in each cinema and I won't get that. People are getting more and more lazy. They'll sit at home. One should not behave as if cinema has to be there for ever—there are alternative ways of watching films.'

Romaine Hart is less pessimistic. She sees no reason why well-run cinemas should not survive and worries more about government stupidity killing off the tentative boom in British film production. Others obviously share her faith. In Grantham, Robin Sanders, a construction engineer with no previous links with the film industry, used his redundancy payment as the basis for building a small functional cinema which he calls the Paragon. With no competitor and fewer than 300 seats to fill, his success is not altogether surprising and it highlights the commercial potential of innumerable other small to medium-sized towns which are at present without cinemas. If Margaret Thatcher ever visits the cinema which Sanders has built in her home town, perhaps she should bear in mind Ian Christie's cautious criticism. 'The government could do a lot to create a more favourable climate. There's no obvious sign of that happening.' Or Engel's more forthright: 'In Germany and France you have cheap—almost interest free—credit. In this country you have taxes.'

Cinemagoing in Britain, 1984

Guy Phelps

Art-House

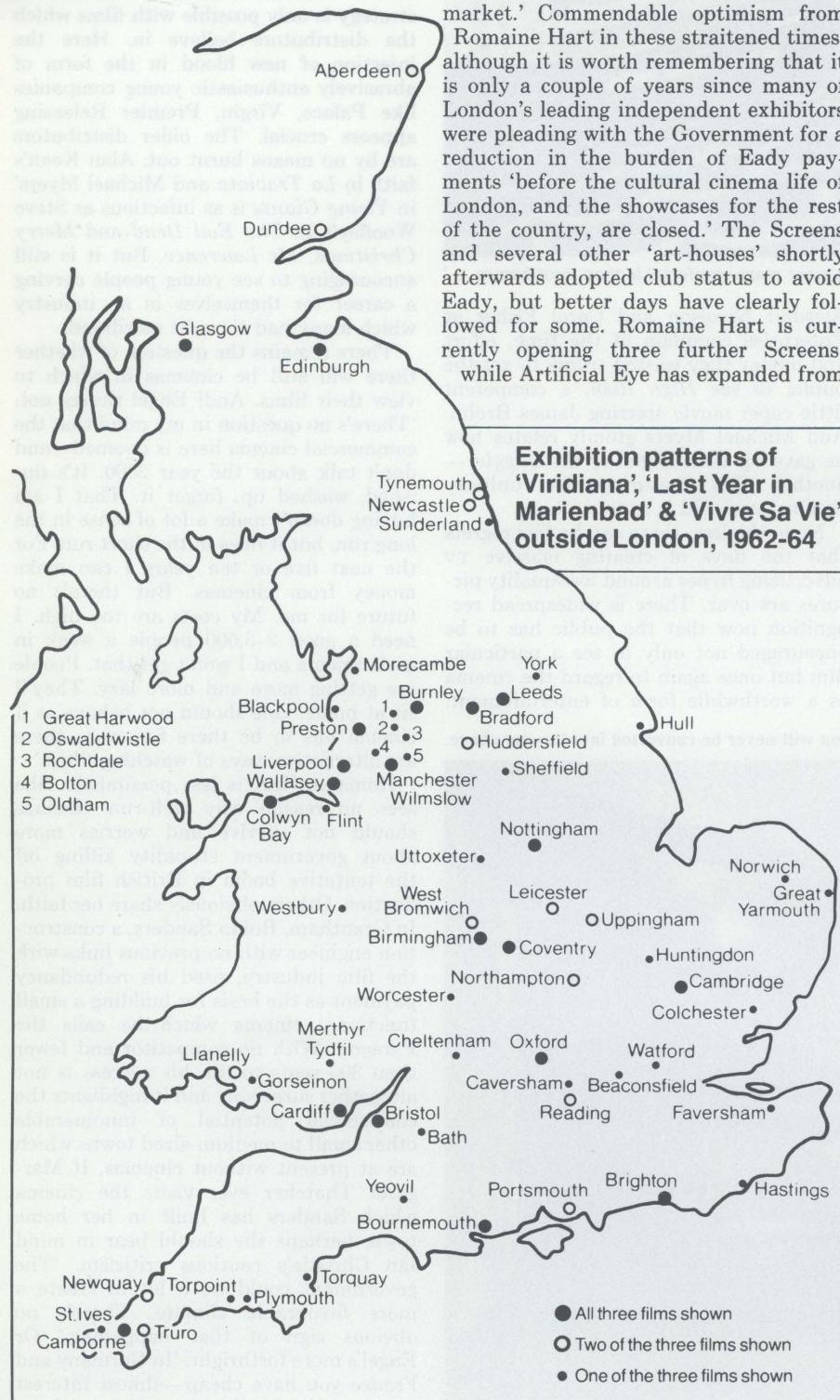
'If I wanted to go and open Screens on the Hills and Greens all over the country, I'm sure I could: I'm sure there is a market.' Commendable optimism from Romaine Hart in these straitened times, although it is worth remembering that it is only a couple of years since many of London's leading independent exhibitors were pleading with the Government for a reduction in the burden of Eady payments 'before the cultural cinema life of London, and the showcases for the rest of the country, are closed.' The Screens and several other 'art-houses' shortly afterwards adopted club status to avoid Eady, but better days have clearly followed for some. Romaine Hart is currently opening three further Screens, while Artificial Eye has expanded from

Camden Town to Chelsea and Covent Garden. But, significantly, this growth is confined to the capital. Beyond, where independents cannot top up their coffers with a new Woody Allen coincident with the West End 'commercial' opening, the survival of 'art-houses' (even the name sounds already anachronistic) is even more precarious.

Just twenty years ago SIGHT AND SOUND conducted a small exercise designed to throw light on the availability around the country of films 'which seemed to us of outstanding quality ... [we have] to work on the assumption that readers see, or at any rate have access to, the kind of films we are writing about.' The distribution patterns of three films—*Viridiana*, *Last Year at Marienbad* and *Vivre sa Vie*—were traced, with the results shown on Map 1. A total of 70 towns were located where at least one of the three could have been seen, including such unlikely spots as Oswaldtwistle, Gorseinon and Uppingham. Indeed those fortunate enough to live near Colwyn Bay, Camborne or Wallasey could have seen all three films. But overall the article expressed disappointment with the coverage, concluding that the future must bring an effort to supply 'the sizeable audience which the cinema, as at present organised, is unable to reach.'

'Organised' was hardly the word. As can be seen, the spread of art cinemas was amazingly haphazard, testament largely to the enthusiasm of exhibitors scattered at random across the country. Many, of course, were opportunists rather than lovers of culture, prepared to programme anything which threatened to draw an audience. One remembers with affection those dilapidated picture palaces whose offerings veered wildly from Bergman or Godard one week to titles promising less subtle pleasures the next.

In fact within a year of the SIGHT AND SOUND article's appearance, moves were being made to expand and rationalise the art-house circuit. As early as 1948 the Radcliffe Report had announced itself 'impressed by the need to extend the [British Film] Institute's influence outside London'; but in the years that followed lack of finance was the excuse for the consistent failure to act upon this recommendation. At last, in 1965, a comparative explosion of activity erupted. Not only was a list of proposed sites for 'National Film Theatres' drawn up, but wherever local enthusiasm and financial commitment were encountered develop-



ments were set in motion. Within two years fifteen Film Theatres had been established on a variety of bases. Since local support was the spur to activity, it followed that these new cinemas were just as randomly distributed as the old. But at least a start had been made, and a virtue was made of necessity by the argument that 'the greatest quality of the Institute's regional expansion programme is its flexibility.'

For ten years the network grew, reaching a total of fifty by 1976. But by then 'flexibility' had long been abandoned and replaced by a more considered policy. Over the years the precise terminology used to describe the aims of regional exhibition has varied, but as early as 1972 a review had concluded that cinemas should give way to 'film centres' whose activities would extend beyond simply showing films. Through 'thematic programming', documentation, provision of lectures and discussions, etc., audiences were to be encouraged to engage more actively with the medium, to become 'cineliterate'. Those venues unable or unwilling to turn in this direction have gradually (or in some cases quite suddenly) parted company from the Institute, normally operating on a rather more commercial basis subsequently. At present there are 33 'public exhibition venues' in 30 towns supported by the Institute in partnership with local authorities, the Regional Arts Associations, private sponsorship, and of course the paying public. In addition there are about ten further cinemas showing primarily 'art' films, many of these also subsidised through their location in arts centres or theatres.

The intention had been to increase the availability of minority interest cinema to audiences outside London, so that 'the pattern of cinemagoing in Britain could be radically changed, to the advantage of producers, distributors and exhibitors alike.' But, far from filling gaps in the existing network, the new structure has in fact entirely replaced it.

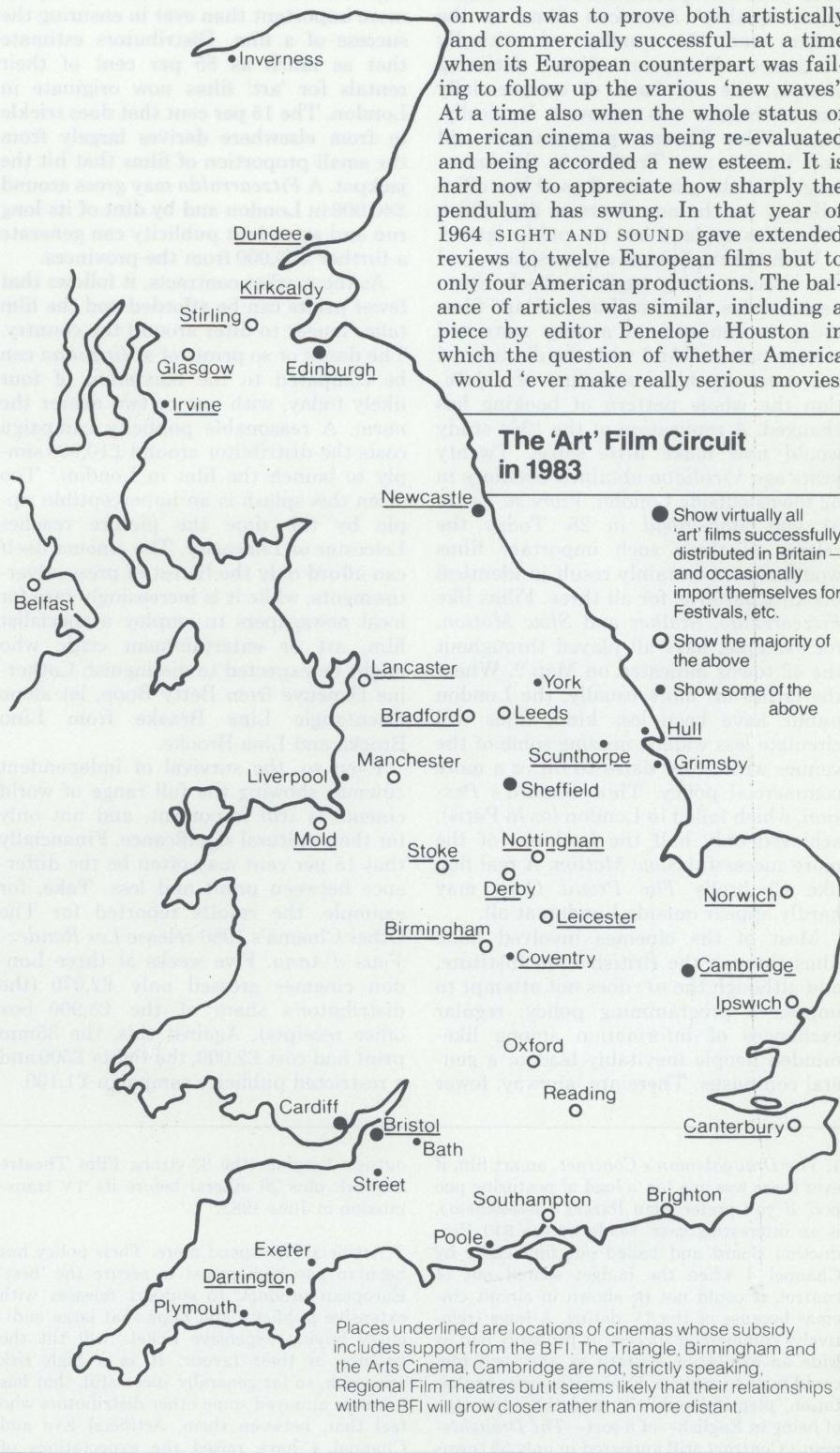
Back in 1964 there were 3,000 cinemas. Today there are only 1,500 screens operating on around 900 sites (well over 100 of them in London). Among the vast number of businesses swept away when the public deserted the cinema were all the old 'art-houses': not a single one remains in its old form. Slender profit margins disappeared entirely as audiences dwindled, and successive governments failed to offer a helping hand. The belated abolition of Entertainment Tax in 1960 served to delay the inevitable for some, only for the imposition of Value Added Tax in 1974 to deliver the *coup de grâce*. And always the Eady Levy, although an important prop to production, has diminished exhibitors' income. France's five hundred art cinemas are a testament to a more enlightened legislative process.

Television, of course, was an important factor in the decline of the cinema habit. Until 1964 it had presented no direct competition to foreign language films,

but that year saw the opening of BBC2, whose 'World Cinema' series brought such material to a wider audience than ever before. As such, many hoped that it would help to create a new audience who would pursue their new interest beyond their own living rooms. Even in 1970 a survey of distributors published in *Films and Filming* demonstrated a general consensus that television exposure could only be beneficial. Nowadays, when subtitled films have become just another form of cheap programming (and even the performance of Channel 4 has been generally disappointing in this respect), this view is less often expressed. Television money is often crucial in the deals

that bring films into distribution, but this is collaboration by necessity rather than choice. The early transmission of so many new foreign language films cannot but encourage waverers to wait for their appearance on the 'box'.

But there is one other factor behind the collapse of the 'art-house'. In 1964 SIGHT AND SOUND could glide easily from 'quality film' to 'continental film' without raising critical eyebrows too far. If the two terms were hardly synonymous, at least one did not have to apologise for treating them as such. This could not be done today. The American cinema of the early 60s was undeniably in the doldrums. It was soon, however, to find fresh wind: the 'New American Film' of 1968 onwards was to prove both artistically and commercially successful—at a time when its European counterpart was failing to follow up the various 'new waves'. At a time also when the whole status of American cinema was being re-evaluated and being accorded a new esteem. It is hard now to appreciate how sharply the pendulum has swung. In that year of 1964 SIGHT AND SOUND gave extended reviews to twelve European films but to only four American productions. The balance of articles was similar, including a piece by editor Penelope Houston in which the question of whether America would 'ever make really serious movies'



(by which was meant 'at the level of Antonioni or Olmi, Resnais or Truffaut') was answered with a probable negative. Significantly, Antonioni and the others remain unchallenged by new film-makers in their own countries, with surprisingly few exceptions, while America has spawned succeeding generations of directors the equal of any in the world.

The result has been that, all innocent and unaware, the circuit cinemas, booking in the regular American product, frequently find themselves playing what can only be described as 'art' films. With the gradual breakdown of the old system under which 104 films were rigidly booked throughout the two main circuits each year this possibility has increased. With 'quality' American films at the Odeon and the number of critically acclaimed European films declining sharply, the old basis of commercially run art-houses was removed. Ironically, many Film Theatre programmers will now book a new Truffaut in the knowledge that the guaranteed good box office will pay for the new Scorsese film which the critics applaud but the public ignore.

With the traditional cinemas gone, and the circuits rarely eager to book European movies, the distributor of 'art' films today is confined to a very restricted release pattern. And with the diminished but more organised structure of exhibition the whole pattern of booking has changed. A replication of the 1964 study would now make little sense. Twenty years ago *Viridiana* obtained bookings in 62 towns outside London, *Vivre sa Vie* in 31 and *Marienbad* in 28. Today the release of three such important films would almost certainly result in identical booking patterns for all three. Films like *Fitzcarraldo*, *Stalker* and *Slow Motion*, for example, have all played throughout the 42 towns indicated on Map 2. Where the critics or, more usually, the London public have been less kind, films will circulate less widely, missing some of the venues with fewer dates to fill or a more commercial policy. Thus Godard's *Passion*, which failed in London (as in Paris), achieved only half the bookings of the more successful *Slow Motion*. A real flop like Chabrol's *The Proud Ones* may hardly appear outside London at all.

Most of the cinemas involved book films through the British Film Institute, and although the BFI does not attempt to impose a programming policy, regular exchanges of information among like-minded people inevitably lead to a general consensus. There are, anyway, fewer

foreign language films to choose from: the 65 'art' films imported into Britain in 1962 had dwindled to 42 twenty years later. And increasingly, as in commercial cinema, audiences tend to concentrate on an ever smaller number of outright successes. So every cinema shows a *Danton* or a *Yol* or a *Draughtsman's Contract*,¹ judgments based on critical and popular reactions to the film in London.

Clearly the London experience is crucial—no provincial cinema has the sort of publicity budget even to attempt to turn a London failure into a provincial hit. The contraction of the regional network (except for the real audience pullers that may now actually secure more bookings than in 1964) has made the capital more important than ever in ensuring the success of a film. Distributors estimate that as much as 85 per cent of their rentals for 'art' films now originate in London. The 15 per cent that does trickle in from elsewhere derives largely from the small proportion of films that hit the jackpot. A *Fitzcarraldo* may gross around £40,000 in London and by dint of its long run and attendant publicity can generate a further £20,000 from the provinces.

As the market contracts, it follows that fewer prints can be afforded and the film takes longer to filter around the country. The dozen or so prints of a *Viridiana* can be compared to the maximum of four likely today, with one or two nearer the norm. A reasonable publicity campaign costs the distributor around £10,000 simply to launch the film in London.² Too often this splash is an imperceptible ripple by the time the picture reaches Leicester or Lancaster. The cinema itself can afford only the barest of press advertisements, while it is increasingly rare for local newspapers to employ a specialist film, art or entertainment critic who might be expected to distinguish Catherine Deneuve from Betty Boop, let alone disentangle Lina Braake from Lino Brocka and Lina Brooke.

Even so, the survival of independent cinemas showing the full range of world cinema is still important, and not only for their cultural significance. Financially that 15 per cent may often be the difference between profit and loss. Take, for example, the results reported for The Other Cinema's 1980 release *Les Rendez-Vous d'Anna*. Five weeks at three London cinemas grossed only £2,070 (the distributor's share of the £5,900 box office receipts). Against this, the 35mm print had cost £2,000, the rights £500 and a restricted publicity campaign £1,100.

Not a balance sheet to impress Mr Micawber. But in fact the whole release was made possible by a commitment from a group of 30 independent cinemas, known as the Regional Consortium (serviced but not run by the BFI). The Consortium loaned money towards the print and promised to play the film in all its cinemas, becoming in effect a very tiny third circuit. The risk to the distributor was thus significantly reduced, enabling a film that would otherwise never have reached our shores to be shown both in London and around the country.³ The list of titles brought into (or back into) distribution in this way is now considerable—ranging from Wilder's *Fedora* to Buñuel's *L'Age d'Or*.

It is a small intervention and one that depends on the continued existence of a sizeable circuit of cinemas to provide 'playdates'. The Institute's current enthusiasm for media centres on the Bristol Watershed model could jeopardise the futures of the smaller Consortium members. If major plans for Manchester and Liverpool materialise, at a time when Institute funds are diminishing in real terms, it seems that unpleasant choices may have to be made, with life support systems switched off from thriving but less ambitious centres. The role of the local authorities looks like being central to the survival of both commercial and non-commercial cinema outside London. In many places the will is there, but the present political outlook may well make implementation impossible.

Sadly, SIGHT AND SOUND increasingly has to assume that it is writing about films which are inaccessible to everyone out of reach of the National Film Theatre. In the Spring 1982 issue David Nicholls discussed French crime thrillers of the 70s. Of the titles mentioned, *Borsalino* and a couple of Chabrols crossed the Channel early in the decade. Since then only *Violette Nozière* (yet another Chabrol, and a Consortium film) has found British distribution, while *Ecoute Voir* turned up on television. Of the rest, nothing has been seen or heard in Britain. The new technologies may offer wider opportunities for showing such films, but only through a different and inappropriate medium. Really to see them requires the cinema screen and an audience, pleasures that for many will soon be not even a memory. ■

My thanks to Artificial Eye, Contemporary Films and The Other Cinema for assistance in preparing this article.

1. *The Draughtsman's Contract*, an art film if ever there was one (or 'a load of posturing poo-poo' if you prefer Alan Parker's assessment), is an interesting case. Made by the BFI Production Board and bailed out financially by Channel 4 when the budget soared out of control, it could not be shown in circuit cinemas because of the TV dating. A huge (relatively) commercial success, it probably had as wide an exhibition pattern as any such film could hope to achieve. Even with clever exploitation, plentiful publicity and the advantage of being in English—of a sort—*The Draughtsman's Contract* still appeared in only 53 towns

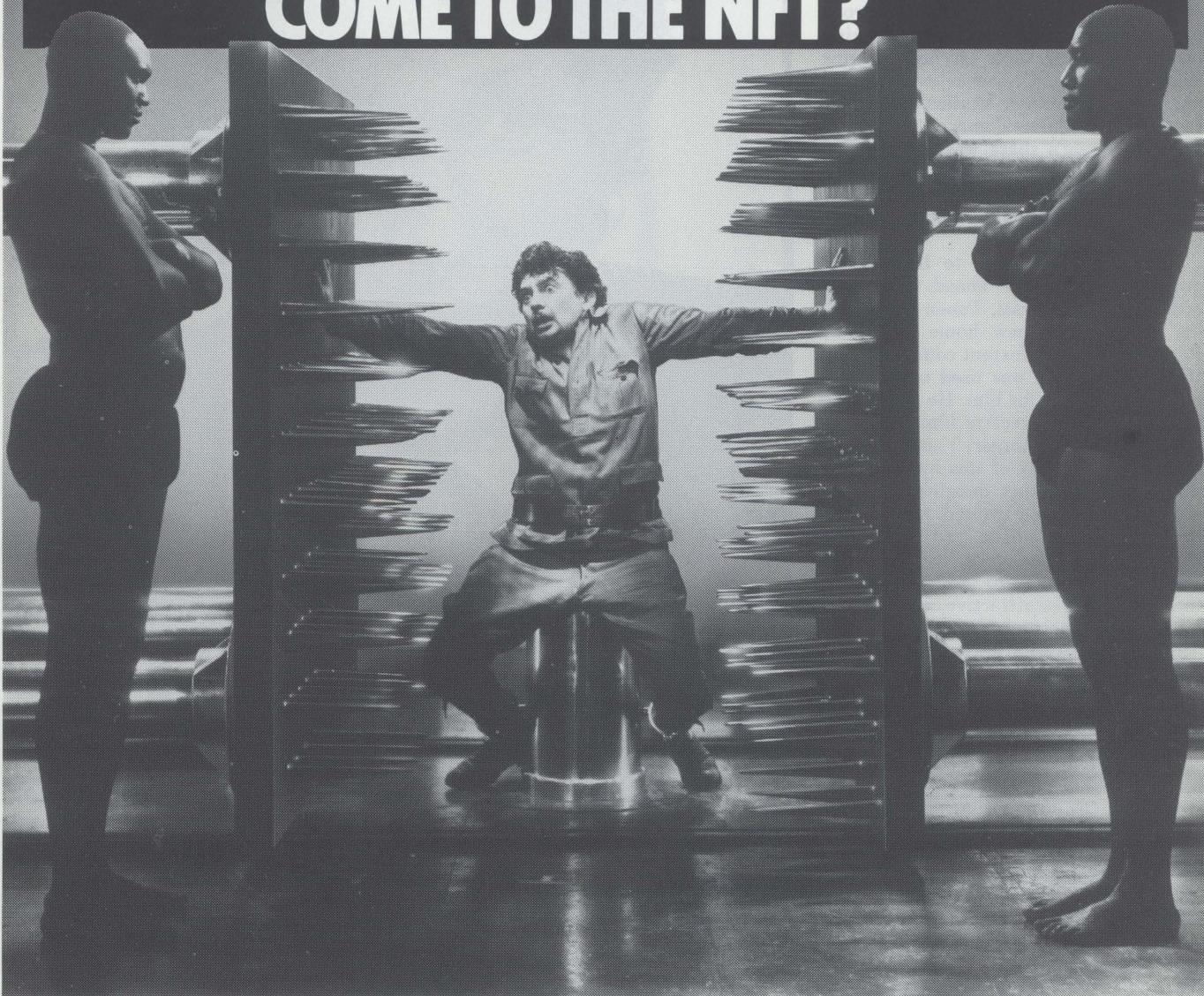
outside London (the 33-strong Film Theatre network plus 20 others) before its TV transmission in June 1983.

2. Artificial Eye spend more. Their policy has been to pay high prices to secure the 'best' European product, to support releases with extensive publicity and hope that large audiences buying expensive tickets will tilt the balance in their favour. It is a high risk approach, so far generally successful, that has however annoyed some other distributors who feel that, between them, Artificial Eye and Channel 4 have raised the expectations of

continental producers. Time will tell whether this is sound business sense or sour grapes.

3. Even today a 'difficult' film like *Les Rendez-Vous d'Anna*, despite the guaranteed bookings, will return only a relatively tiny sum to the distributor—in this case £1,055. In general the 16mm market is expected to yield more than the provincial 35mm bookings, but this is another declining sector with fewer film societies forced to show more commercially appealing programmes. Even a prime film society title like *Stalker* attracted only 100 16mm bookings, bringing in £5,000.

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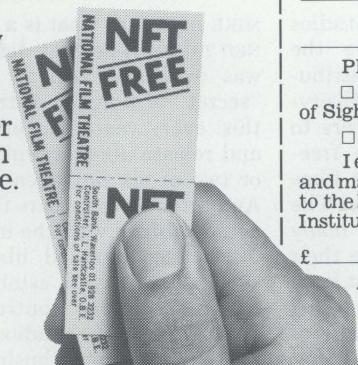
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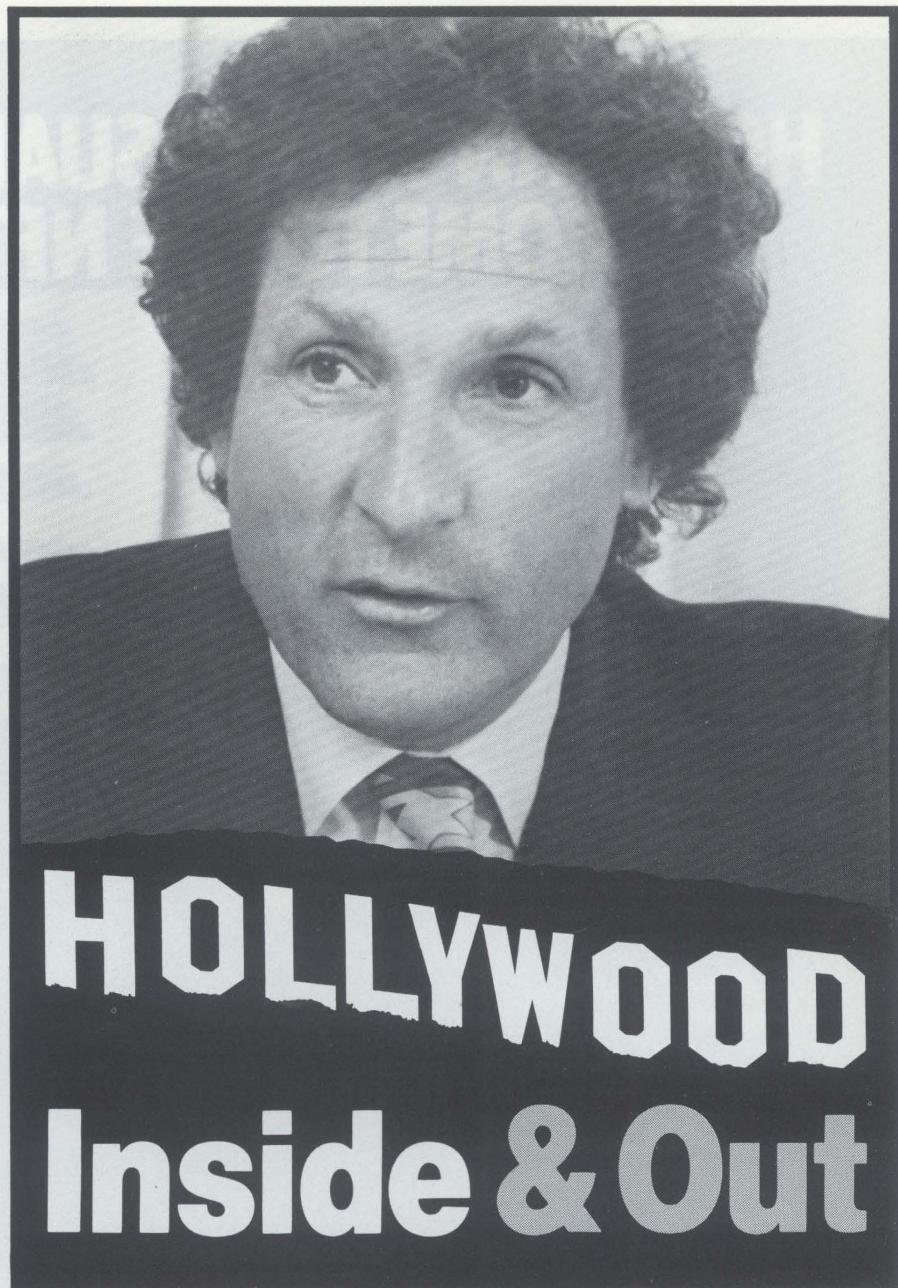
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Recently Ned Tanen, one of the six men in Hollywood who truly 'make the movies', resigned from his job as head of Universal Pictures. Tanen, now 47, ran Universal's film division for ten years (MCA/Universal also owns huge TV studios, a music division, property and other businesses). Most recent studio heads have lasted two or three years. In terms of sheer survival, given that Hollywood politics resemble Italy under the Borgias, it was a remarkable record. During Tanen's decade, Universal was number one among the major studios, judged by their share of the US domestic market. In 1982 Universal's share was a staggering 30 per cent, largely thanks to Steven Spielberg's *E.T.*, which of course has become one of the most successful films ever made in Hollywood.

Clearly, there's much to be said for quitting while you're ahead. Two days after he left Universal, Tanen was roaming his spacious new home in Pacific Palisades, brewing instant coffee in a way that suggested he was used to having a secretary make it for him. He has a salty turn of phrase ('directing films,' he once said, 'isn't brain surgery') and a short temper. On the day of this interview, he was snapping at his daughter and his dogs, all of whom ignored him. Later, having taken a phone call from Bob Rehme, his successor at Universal, he said: 'He sounds 20 years older. I thought, "This is attractive, the son of a bitch only inherited the job 48 hours ago." But that's what those jobs are like.'

Tanen was in the record business before Universal switched him to film and he has rebellious, rock 'n' roll instincts at odds with his seamless history as a Company Man. He started his reign with such films as George Lucas' *American Graffiti* and Milos Forman's *Taking Off*, ended it with *Missing* and *E.T.*, and in between forged alliances with such comedians from *Saturday Night Live* as John Belushi and Bill Murray (*Animal House*, *The Blues Brothers*).



Inside the Studio

Mike Bygrave interviews Ned Tanen

Today, as always, the six major studios dominate Hollywood. They have the money to finance films and the distribution organisations to release them. Everyone else is freelance, from producers to stars, writers and directors. The freelances come up with the ideas for films and have the talent to make them. The studios do the rest. Of course, in many cases the freelances prefer to make their films independently, raising the cost from myriad international sources, from big banks to private investors. But many of these independent productions too end up being sold to the studios for release.

MIKE BYGRAVE: **What is a major studio?**

NED TANEN: The best definition I've seen was in *Daily Variety* and read, 'The "secret" of a major distributor is simply this: every year, year after year, finance and release about twenty films. Not one or two or six but twenty (give or take). And after several years the current product, combined with the incalculable value of the accumulated library, will make such a company an established "major".' All I'd add is that, contrary to what most people think, the studios aren't really in the entertainment business. They're in the business of earning a profit for their

stockholders. They're divisions of major corporations which are about making money.

In recent years haven't the studios succumbed to a 'blockbuster mentality' where they are only interested in making the next *Star Wars* and ignore smaller, quality films? And isn't that self-defeating?

Every studio knows every year that its profits are going to come from two or three films; the rest will break even if they're lucky. The crucial point is that no one knows which two or three. I honestly believe Steven Spielberg never thought *E.T.* would be the biggest grossing movie

of all time. I know first hand that George Lucas, before *Star Wars* came out, had no idea it would be one of the biggest hits of all time. Universal never thought so about *Jaws*—the line forms on the right. So you can't have a 'blockbuster mentality' as such. On the other hand, fewer so-called 'big' films have lost money than medium-sized films. A slate of \$8–10m films can put you away pretty good, not just because of the production cost but the cost of marketing the damn things. Every company tries to make quality films. It's wonderful if you have a *Missing* or a *Diner*, and you go to the dinner parties and everyone says what a wonderful film, but you'd better not fool yourself it has anything to do with your profit and loss sheet. If you are making 18 or 20 movies a year and your attitude going in is my attitude going in to *Missing*—'if a miracle happens we'll get our money back'—you're not going to be around long. And neither is the company that employs you.

But lately most of the major studios have set up Classics divisions to release quality or foreign or independent films. Isn't this a recognition that the studios aren't doing their job by making such films themselves?

The Classics divisions are the kind of thing the media blows out of proportion. Once in a while one of those movies will do some business. Columbia got \$4m or \$5m out of *Das Boot* in America. God knows what they had to spend in advertising to get that—no one even wants to ask! If you can run a Classics division as a small operation it's good for you in several ways: it gives you a good image, it's a source of supplementary income so long as you don't kid yourself it'll amount to much, it opens some doors to some people you might want to be in business with. But the major companies can't spend a lot of time or money in this area. They've got worldwide distribution networks, people on the payroll, plant, stockholders to satisfy, they have to go after films that can really generate income. If one of these movies runs for 40 weeks in one theatre on the East Side of New York or 30 weeks in LA and the critics love it, what does it mean? Who the hell cares?

So what sort of films do the major studios try to make? When you were a studio head what did you look for?

The first thing to realise is that the film business has changed considerably. Unfortunately, it is to a very large degree a defensive business these days, and those jobs are defensive jobs. Ninety-five per cent of your answers are going to be 'no'. And in the other 5 per cent you're looking for ingredients that have been successful or that offer you some kind of insurance—stars, a director who has made hit comedies making a comedy, and so on. That's not new. Hollywood always worked that way. What is new is that the people who sit in those executive chairs are less and less willing to take chances. It's really about hedges—what is our exposure on this movie? How much can we lose?



Missing: Sissy Spacek.

It's wonderful if you have a *Missing* or a *Diner*, and you go to dinner parties and everyone says what a wonderful film, but you'd better not fool yourself it has anything to do with your profit and loss sheet. ■



Diner.

A great deal of success is accidental. No one likes to admit that, but it's true. This is the last personal business in the world. It can't be run by committee. It comes down to one man saying yes or no. It's very instinctive, it's antennae, it's not just developing and making good material. Something comes across your desk and everything in you says there is no way—even if this movie is brilliant, no one will want to see it.

The attitude of the major companies is to look at one year, say two or three years down the road, and to effect a programme of movies based on the company's view of the marketplace. It's about continuity, about management, about a consistent point of view and about trying to stay ahead of the marketplace. And the fact is you are going to be wrong a lot of the

time. You must understand too that you end up being in the wholesale clothing business sometimes. You find yourself making pictures you don't want to make, but you have no movie for next May or next February so you *must* make something to feed your distribution machine. And sometimes the movie you didn't want to make turns out a hit, like Paramount had with *Flashdance*, and you wind up taking the credit.

There's another syndrome. The classic example was when the major studios were all in London producing movies in the 1960s. But it can also happen if you spend too much time in Malibu or the Hamptons, for example. You get pretentious. You start to talk yourself into movies. And the truth of it is they are stillborn from the beginning. They have

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nowhere to go. Regardless of their quality. *I'll Never Forget What'sisname*, *Isadora*. The world was waiting for a movie about Isadora Duncan, made by a good director, but who cares? *Sunday, Bloody Sunday*, final film rental a million six. Not a bad movie, but that's not the point. You can take the position, which I suppose should be taken, that you have to make a certain number of movies which are not Burt Reynolds in a car or James Bond jumping off a cliff. But every company went through a period of making these so-called small quality films and every company lost its shirt on them.

Why?

The appeal of the subject is not wide enough. They are viewed as provincial movies. The audience perceives them as 'above' it in some way. It's very, very tough to sell a serious movie. When that serious movie is also relatively provincial it's doomed. Now there was a time, five or ten years ago, when you could sometimes 'get out' on these movies in the foreign market. But the Hollywood film is not the staple of the foreign market it once was, for many reasons. The state of the international economy, the development of indigenous film industries, devaluation. Latin America is a total disaster. You can have eight billion people in the movie theatres and come out with four dollars—and then not be able to collect it. Most American movies now are not releasable foreign. Conversely, the international audience now wants the American film for the *phenomenon* of the American film. Provincial American stories are no longer of interest. Everyone in the world has discovered America, for good or bad.

You say the major studios try to make films 'based on their view of the marketplace'. But how do you reach a view of the marketplace?

The movie business, for better or worse, has become primarily a marketing business. That means you're in terrible trouble if you just make a good movie. Or even a great movie. With every project you have to ask yourself, is this a movie we can sell? Nobody needs a movie: it isn't going to clothe them or feed their family. So every movie you make had better have some element you can use to catch people's attention. We made *Best Little Whorehouse in Texas* with Burt Reynolds and Dolly Parton and we were criticised for doing so (not least by the authors of the original Broadway show). But they made that movie work. People came to see those two together. We made



Isadora: Vanessa Redgrave.

¶ The world was waiting for a movie about Isadora Duncan, made by a good director, but who cares? ¶

Melvin and Howard, acclaimed by the critics, we couldn't drive people into the theatres if we'd given them free cars at the other end. We changed the campaign at least four times—no one went.

The bad side of this equation, which I'm afraid we're beginning to see, is that the marketing division is starting to run the studio. That's like making movies out of a computer. Movies are tending to be less adventurous as they are guided more and more by marketing people.

You say Hollywood is about marketing, but the criticism I hear all the time from producers is that the studios don't market movies properly. They're too quick to pull a film out if it isn't immediately successful, without waiting to build an audience.

Producers always think you are not supporting their movie and directors always think you've destroyed their masterpiece. The people who finance and distribute a movie and whose jobs depend on it being

¶ We made *Melvin and Howard*, acclaimed by the critics, we couldn't drive people into the theatres if we'd given them free cars at the other end. ¶



Melvin and Howard.

successful are just as keen as the producer or director to have a hit. What happens? Sometimes the studios get caught up with too much product and can't give each film the attention it needs. Sometimes your marketing people simply can't get a perception of a movie, they can't find a way to sell it. As with *Melvin and Howard*. As with [Ellen Burstyn's] *Resurrection*. When we finally started to attract an audience for that one, we got the wrong audience. We got religious fundamentalists who thought it was heresy. Do studios pull pictures too quickly? In some cases, yes. In most cases, no, because it isn't up to them. A studio has far less control over the fate of its movies than it would like you to believe.

The exhibitors control the fate of the movies. If a movie isn't working, it's gone in a week. The studio can call up and say it'll pump advertising money in and the exhibitor couldn't care less. If people aren't in his theatre, you're gone, you're in the street. You are the abandoned orphan child. And it is a two-edged sword. Because selling a movie is so expensive now, the studios have become more conservative. They'll put the money in up front, but if a movie isn't working, they'll pull the plug faster than they used to. What is a modest American campaign for a movie now? \$5m or \$6m. I think the real criticism is not that the studios don't support the movies they release, but that they've become more reluctant to release them, nationally or internationally. If they have doubts about a movie, they'll rein in the release, put it out only in certain areas of the US, for example, and see if anyone wants to go to it.

But don't the studios extract guarantees in terms of money and playing time from the exhibitors?

Sure they have guarantees. Financial guarantees really only apply with big, expensive movies. All other guarantees are worthless.

What caused the crisis in Hollywood at the end of the 1970s? Or was there a real crisis at all?

The film business is cyclical and it has always had a crisis mentality. The other side of the coin is that it's also an optimistic business, so it lurches between crazed optimism and total gloom. But there was a real crisis in rising costs. Rocketing costs, beyond all bounds. It was not a natural rise in production costs. The major studios did well in the 1970s and as a result a group of independent companies entered the film business looking for a share in the golden egg. It was a case of the new boy on the block coming in and having to make some major pronouncements. So you go to a star or a director and pay him a million dollars more than he has ever been paid before. Because remember this business is about distribution and marketing. You have to have credibility with the exhibitors to get your movies shown, and you have to convince them you're in the business to stay and you're in the business in a big way. These independent

companies incidentally have disappeared, almost without exception. And the majors have been left with the debris.

We have stopped the rise in costs. We have controlled them. Increasingly, the studios have made the directors responsible for any overage, made them put their own money on the line, and it has been amazing how some of those same directors who were spending small fortunes turned around and started bringing their pictures in under budget. Literally overnight. The studios have also cut the number of films they make. They have taken the position that they'll spend more time on pre-production, more time on working out the budget, more time saying 'no' to films where no one could come up with the answer as to how much they were going to cost. A lot of the meetings have gotten tougher. And then, and this hasn't finally worked itself out and I don't mean it as a blacklist, but some of the more difficult people, some of them actors, who were more uncontrollable in terms of work and discipline and showing up to do whatever they were supposed to do, when they were supposed to do it, have found it a little tougher out there, a little more difficult to get work.

audience is around 18–20, but it's not 14 any more.

Some of the foreign market is recovering. Europe is strong with the exception of Britain where the whole business is dead. It doesn't exist any more. Japan has made a recovery. The network TV business is non-existent unless you have a movie they want—Burt Reynolds or Clint Eastwood. Otherwise you can't give it to them. The pay TV, cable TV market has come in to fill part of that gap, but only part. Certain movies are hot on cable, often more adult movies—*Missing* was, so was *The Four Seasons, Officer and a Gentleman*. But cable TV in America is a monopoly; Home Box Office controls 70 per cent of the market. And they're incredibly arrogant—arrogance you wouldn't believe. It's a real death throes battle between the studios and HBO and one the studios must win to survive. You can't make it theatrically alone and you can't have just one customer dictating not only the price but whether or not they'll even buy your product.

We were talking about the increasing power of marketing divisions in the studios. A lot of that is because they



When we finally started to attract an audience for *Resurrection* we got the wrong audience. We got religious fundamentalists who thought it was heresy. ■

How easy is it for a studio to lose money on a movie?

Very easy. I read an interview with Lord Grade the other day where he said it was almost impossible to lose money given the sale of ancillary rights and so on. He should know! I absolutely disagree. The American domestic market is very strong. It has been constant for almost a decade at 14 to 16m admissions a week. The change is that the audience has gotten older and I think that's good news. It'll allow you to make a few more movies which aren't about car racing or rites of passage, God help us. Basically your

generally are responsible, to a large degree, for the ancillary markets too. So they are the ones who can answer your questions. What can we get back from pay [TV]? From the networks, if we can get it on a network? Theatrically, if it's a modest hit? On guarantees? It's the risk that matters—if it's a hit, it takes care of itself. In most studios now you are getting a lot more input from the head of distribution saying 'You're crazy to make this movie.' For several reasons, I think that's a bad thing. But there is this wonderful moment when they ask, 'Who is going to want to see this movie?' That question

Resurrection: Ellen Burstyn.

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never used to be asked. Never. It sure as hell is asked now and it's very tough to jam a movie through a studio if your distribution people don't want it.

What about the money the studio takes in from the films it makes? Isn't the game rigged too much in its favour as opposed to the producer and the people who actually create those films?

You come to my studio with a film you want to make and I agree to do it. What do I charge you? Interest on the money I put up. That's normal commercial practice. A facilities fee for offices and studio space. That's not significant. A theatrical distribution fee. I think the studios earn that money. They're in business 365 days a year. If you have a hit movie, you have to help carry the flops, and if you have a flop, you have to be carried. Prints and advertising. That's always a fight. In your eyes, I'm either going to spend too little or too much on advertising. I've had producers call me up and beg me to stop advertising their films when they've become hits, because it's coming out of their profits. A distribution fee on ancillary sales. That's the one area where I think criticism is valid. The studios take a very substantial fee for what is basically a few phone calls.

No one accused the studios of being run by choirboys and no one has accused the people who make the movies of being choirboys either. They have attorneys who are just as sophisticated and bright as the ones who represent the companies. The plain truth is that it's very tough to make a killing in the movie business. It's not a golden windfall. The only way—almost—is to have a film which is not just a big hit but a big hit *right now*. If it takes time, you have to figure the studio is chasing it with advertising and it's costing them, and you, \$250,000 for every million they get in. That's what they say it costs and to a degree I believe them.

You defend the studios financially, but can you defend them in terms of personnel? Studio executives by and large are not people who make films. Most of them wouldn't know how to make a film.

It's been tried the other way. We all do remember the Directors Company. We all do remember First Artists. Do you really want to discuss American Zoetrope? It's not too bad that people who have some form of objectivity and who are not either directors or actors or film editors or writers are picking the product. What those jobs are about is picking a group of films over a period of time. They're not in fact about the intrinsic value in each of those films. I pose to you

that if you put four directors in charge of choosing what films are to be made in the course of a year, they'll end up shooting each other before the first conversation is over.

I've dealt with most of the stars and almost all the directors in Hollywood and I've met very, very few who have *any* perception of an audience. That's not putting them down. They're looking at that script as a role they can play or a story they've always wanted to do. And when they get in a position of power, of success, they always find a way to slip one or two of them through—and invariably they're a disaster. It has happened time and time again. But you're right in that the gap, the lack of understanding between the studios and the directors, is a real problem. Remember directors in this country have never had the status they have in Europe or some other parts of the world. They came close to it a couple of years ago, but the excesses of some of them finished that. Now they're back being hired hands and they resent it. Every director wants to make his film about life in . . . wherever he grew up and all the studios are saying, 'Fine, great, now why don't you make *Porky's 3*?'

So what makes a good studio executive? And hasn't the executive musical chairs we've seen in Hollywood in recent years been very damaging to the continuity and good management you say is vital to a major studio?

A good executive has to have a feeling for the job, and they are very tough to find. It's tough to find someone who can read a newspaper article or a magazine article or a treatment or a script and get anything from it. Obviously it's easier with a

script. But to read, say, a magazine article like *Saturday Night Fever* and say, yes, I really see where this could be a movie that would work. I use that example because I read *Saturday Night Fever* and I passed on it. I could not for the life of me see how this provincial piece of material about these youths in a New York borough would be a hit movie. There are very few people who can do these jobs and in fact the more people you hire in a production department, the murkier the waters become. It's just more people second-guessing each idea.

The studios are inundated, literally inundated with ideas for movies. And again, which is the serious proposal? You never know where the next George Lucas is coming from. I got *American Graffiti*. I'm not that smart. Every company in town had turned it down—twice. And I've turned down movies that have become hits in other places. One of the biggest problems in any of the studios is, you had better have people on your payroll with catholic tastes, some diversity of views about movies. Because if everyone in the company wants to make *Raiders of the Lost Ark* type of movies or rites of passage type of movies, you will dig yourself in a hole so deep you'll never get out.

As far as executive movement goes, that's a legitimate complaint. There was a period recently when the longest serving top executive in Hollywood had been in the job two weeks. What's worse is, it's not new blood coming in, it's the same faces going round. One reason is the difficulty of finding new people to do these jobs, people who are capable and responsible and who *want* to do them. It's burnout. It's 'I will not take one more

**I got *American Graffiti*. I'm not that smart.
Every company in town had turned it down – twice.**



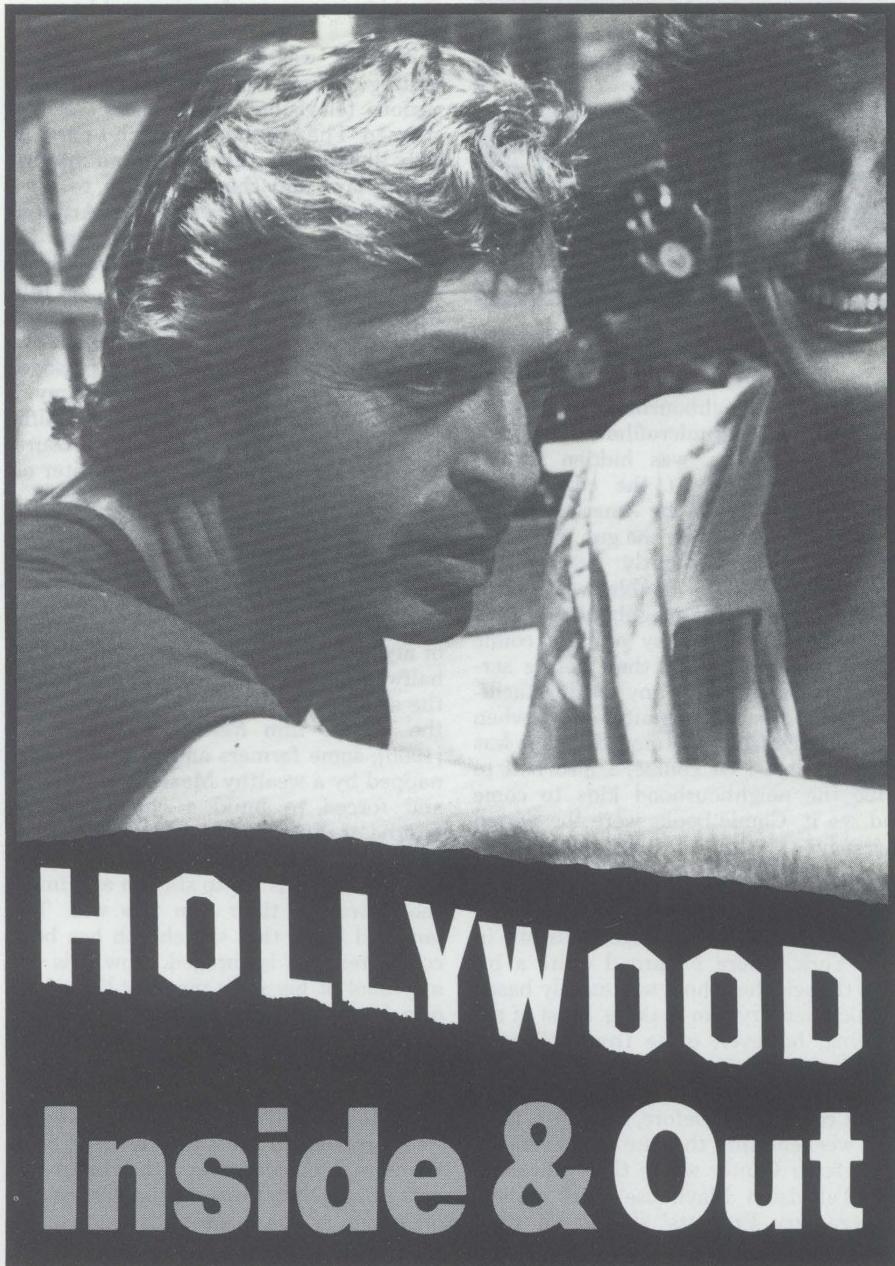
meeting with a director about how I ruined his masterpiece.'

I also think it's a valid criticism that advertising and publicity people are at great risk every time a regime changes. They're very vulnerable to executive movement because when movies fail, it's always 'the ads were no good'. It's never the movie was no good or the guy who picked the movie made a mistake. And, frankly, it's easier to replace adpub people than anybody else. You can take them from other areas—of advertising, of PR—and once they've learned the ropes, the job is fundamentally the same.

Now that you're no longer running a major studio, what are your own criticisms of Hollywood?

I think in general the marketing of movies is a serious problem. I've always thought so and I don't have any smart solutions. I don't think the marketing people have enough time to work on movies. I think the way movies are marketed now is so expensive you can't really get a handle on it or control it. The only way the companies control it now is to say 'this movie doesn't seem to be working—stop spending', which is obviously crude and unscientific. I think having to handle movies and release them really at only two peak periods, Christmas and the summer, is suicidal. Yet all the companies have this mentality and the business has proved it's true—which doesn't mean it's right. I don't think every studio is always burdened with great leadership. I think one of the problems some studios have is a constant, chronic turnover of leadership which leaves terrible vacuums and holes in making movies, releasing movies, dealing with creative people. I think technically, physically the way all the studios operate is in the Dark Ages and that is the real root of the problems between the studios and the unions. That is a never-ending nightmare. You know, Hollywood is a business where the unions are totally without any sense of reality and the companies are not always realistic in their dealings with the unions. I don't know what's going to happen to Hollywood when Lew Wasserman isn't around because he is the *only one*—from either side of the desk—who can deal with them, and he's as tough on the other companies as he is on the unions.

I think the companies haven't put remotely enough money into advancing their own technology, examining ways to make movies which will not only look better but take less time to make. So much of making movies is waste of time, standing around not doing anything, set-ups, lighting. Making movies is so expensive, so overburdened with people who don't contribute, so featherbedded. Hollywood has always been a business that just goes on. It's either 'everything's OK' or everybody panics. But the basics of the business, where you could cut the shooting of a movie from 55 days to 35 days by making the process simpler—that's what nobody is willing to think about or put time and money into developing. □



HOLLYWOOD Inside & Out

Cohen on Cohen

Tony Williams

LARRY COHEN: b. New York City, 1938; writer/producer/director (credits for his company, Larco, have ranged from *Black Caesar*, 1973, through *It's Alive*, 1974, to *The Private Files of J. Edgar Hoover*, 1976, and *Q—The Winged Serpent*, 1982); a Hollywood independent who turned his back on a sure career as a TV 'supplier'. He here sheds light on some byways of a little-known career.

TONY WILLIAMS: What decided you on film-making?

LARRY COHEN: My first childhood hobby was drawing comic books. They were all intricately worked out stories with characters, surprise endings—quite adult in terms of content, rather than being silly or frivolous, and, unusually, quite dramatic. A comic strip is to me very like a storyboard. Then I got hold of an 8mm

Larry Cohen

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camera. My first film was a spy picture. Stalin had died that day [1953]. We filmed in my neighbourhood park: Russian agents hiding microfilm. The microfilm, I remember, was hidden in the muzzle of a gun. At the climax, the Russian spy wanted the American agent to shoot because, when the gun was fired, that would inadvertently destroy the microfilm. We had a double twist. I had to bribe some of the neighbourhood kids to be in the picture by offering comic books as a reward for their acting services. We didn't have any editing facilities. It was a very economical effort: when it came back from Eastman Kodak it was ready to show. Of course, I also had to bribe the neighbourhood kids to come and see it. Comic books were the period currency.

How did you begin to work in film and television?

I went to the City College Institute in New York, where I learned quite a bit even though the school was mainly based on documentary film-making. Most of my training, however, came from following around the directors on some of the great live television shows of the 50s. While I was at college, and before, I used to sneak each weekend into the NBC studios in the Rockefeller Center where they rehearsed the 'Television Playhouse' and 'Robert Montgomery Presents' shows. I'd walk through the rehearsals following the director, stay for the run-through and then go home and watch the show on Sunday and Monday nights. I was there so often that nobody bothered me: I got a pretty liberal education at NBC. I later worked as a pageboy at Rockefeller Center, but by that time most of the programmes had gone to film and moved to Hollywood.

I wrote a screenplay, an adaptation of Evan Hunter's 87th Precinct novels, which was bought by 'Kraft Television Theatre', then the only live TV show coming out of New York, and telecast about a month after I resigned as a pageboy. I followed up with a second teleplay for 'Kraft', 'Night Cry', which starred Jack Klugman and introduced Peter Falk for the first time on night television. He became an overnight star as a result of that show. After some time in the Army, I returned to New York and did the weekly 'United States Steel Hour'. In an autobiographical play, *The Golden Thirty*, I was played by Keir Dullea. It was about a kid who wants to be a comedian, who works in the resort area of New York and has his material stolen by an older comedian. In the end,

the kid gives up performing and becomes a writer.

While I was in the Army, I began writing outlines and submitting them to various television programmes. I sent a story to 'The Defenders', which I particularly liked, having always had an interest in the law, and they hired me to do a script even though I was in the Army in Virginia. Only weekends were free for meetings. On Friday I would go AWOL, catch a flight to New York City, get into Manhattan at 10 a.m. for my meeting, then go back on Sunday night to face the consequences. I wrote thirteen episodes of the series. After leaving the Army, I went to California and found no difficulty getting work, particularly on court-room shows since I had been a writer on the Emmy Award winning 'Defenders'.

Most episodes of 'The Defenders' I wrote had to do with moral issues and questions of loyalty to one's country: treason was the topic most frequently examined. And one regular characteristic of my scripts was a twist somewhere past halfway inverting the issues and turning the story back on itself. For example, in the feature film *Return of the Seven* [1966], some farmers and peons are kidnapped by a wealthy Mexican landowner and forced to build a church in the middle of the desert as a memorial to his dead son. Although rescued by gunfighters, they decide to stay on and finish the church of their own free will. The landlord hears that the church has been completed and is enraged. Now it is not a symbol of his son's memory but of his own humiliation. Determined to destroy the church, he musters a small army only to be defeated by the gunfighters and farmers.

In Hollywood, my first idea for a series was 'Branded', a Western starring Chuck Connors. I followed that with 'The Invaders'. At one time I was making large sums of money as the busiest writer of pilots in Hollywood. But television was a mistake since from the beginning I had wanted to make my own movies. It was, however, quite difficult to pass up all these easy opportunities. NBC wanted me to become a 'supplier' like Quinn Martin and Aaron Spelling. They even gave me a daytime soap opera for my company to produce. I accepted the show but never went near the set, thereby passing up a once in a lifetime opportunity.

How did 'The Invaders' measure up to your original conception of the series?

I was dissatisfied with 'The Invaders' with which I had very little to do. I thought there were too many aliens in each episode. They sometimes outnumbered the humans and the mystery and fun of finding out who was an alien was lost. But the series was, as I intended, a parody of the McCarthy years, a witch hunt of aliens. In the same way, 'Branded' was a series about a blacklisted cowboy, a soldier stripped of his rank for cowardice who can't prove his honour and courage. When I told Chuck Connors this he had me fired from the show. But by that time the series was in the Top Ten and it didn't really

matter because I was tired of writing the episodes.

Were you happy with the treatment of your script for *Daddy's Gone A-Hunting*? *Daddy's Gone A-Hunting* was written for Alfred Hitchcock. I met him in New York and told him the story; he said he loved it and wanted to make it. When I returned to Hollywood, however, to begin work with him, Universal informed me that he had changed his mind. Undeterred, I invited a friend, Lorenzo Semple Jnr, to collaborate with me, and we finished the script in two weeks and got it to Hitchcock. But it was rejected: Hitchcock felt we had done all the work, there was nothing left for him to contribute. Indeed it was a perfect Hitchcock script. I later gave it to Joan Harrison, Hitchcock's executive assistant, who wanted to produce it. A company called National General offered several hundred thousand dollars and engaged Mark Robson to direct. He was fresh from a huge success, *Valley of the Dolls*, and had previously imitated Hitchcock in *The Prize*, a take-off of *North by Northwest*. I worked with Robson ... but subsequently was disappointed with the casting and decided I couldn't stay with the picture. This is what finally convinced me to direct my own films.

Why did you choose *Bone*, which was released in Britain as *Dial Rat for Terror*, as your first film?

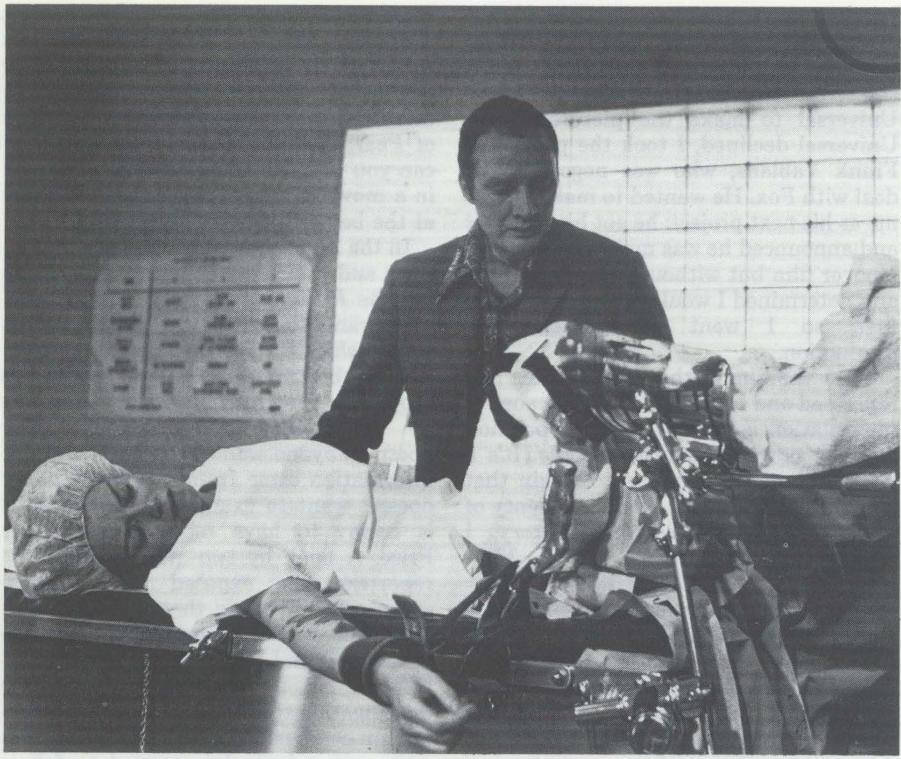
Since it only had a few actors, I thought I could handle it as a first picture. It was partly based on a story I had written when I was thirteen, *Three Hours to Kill*, about a man whose wife was held hostage by a killer. He decides not to come back with the money but to take off and let the killer dispose of his wife for him. Instead of doing it straight, however, I proposed doing it as a black comedy. I started it on the basic premise and then, as I often do, asked the characters to write their own screenplay for me. When things are going well, the characters often begin to make up their own lines and the story reveals itself as it goes along. I much prefer to write things where there is no outline ahead of time, where there is a sense of discovery.

The hypocrisy of marriage and the destruction of the family are themes in *Bone* which recur in your later films.

The home is where the heart is and where the heartache is. I believe that everything can be traced back to the family. Even a gangster film such as *Black Caesar* [UK title *Godfather of Harlem*] has a great deal to do with family life. *Bone* is a fantasy in the mind of the imprisoned boy charged with dope smuggling. But more than that each character is the fantasy of another. The hippy girl whom Duggan meets is his fantasy creature; the black man who invades the house is the wife's fantasy figure come to life; and the sex-crazed Beverly Hills housewife is his fantasy.

What was your attitude towards *Black Caesar*, which belonged to the 'blaxploitation' genre?

Oddly enough, *Black Caesar* is not



I don't think *It's Alive* is more of a horror story than *The Elephant Man*.

blaxploitation. In this type of film, the black man, a superhero like Shaft or Superfly, is always victorious; he only likes white women and gets as many as he wants and never suffers any guilt. He usually knows he is better than a white man and proves it. *Black Caesar* was about a self-doubting man who tries but fails to live like the white man, to beat him at his own game. His relationship with his girl is a sham; his relationship with his parents destroys him. He rejects the white woman who offers herself to him. All the genre rules are violated.

After the sequel to *Black Caesar*, *Hell Up in Harlem*, which you have said was a misjudgment, what led you to direct a horror movie, *It's Alive*?

I simply wanted to tell this story. I don't think *It's Alive* is more of a horror story than *The Elephant Man*. But it did cross my mind that if I could make a horror movie that made audiences actually shed a tear it would be an accomplishment. In the credit sequence, when the flashlights merge into a blinding light, the audience was intentionally placed in the position of the hunted mutant. (Spielberg used the sequence almost intact in *E.T.*) *Them!*, one of my favourite films, with its climax in the Los Angeles storm drains, was parodied in *It's Alive*; just as *The F.B.I. Story*, which I consider a sham, was parodied in *The Private Files of J. Edgar Hoover*.

What was it like working with Bernard Herrmann on *It's Alive*?

He was always my favourite composer. He had quit *The Exorcist* in anger and become available: I was lucky. I sent him a black and white print of *It's Alive*; he liked it and said he wanted to do it. He

invited me to London for the recording sessions and I brought with me the main titles with the flashlight sequence, for which he'd written an overture sight unseen. We put the film and soundtrack together and by some miracle they matched.

Benny left America for England after his split with Hitchcock over *Torn Curtain*. His music was out of vogue; the big orchestral scores had been replaced by music with themes—everyone wanted a Henry Mancini score with a hit song in the title. So Benny began working for independent directors: Brian De Palma got him to do *Sisters*. He was supposed to do *The Exorcist*, but couldn't get along with the director, William Friedkin. Friedkin said: 'I want you to do a better score than you did for *Citizen Kane*.' To which Benny replied: 'Why didn't you make a better movie than *Citizen Kane*?'

The recording session for *It's Alive* was wonderful. It took place at Cripplegate Church in London because Benny wanted the resonance of the church's giant organ. This was in 1973, during the power shortages. We brought our own generator. There was nothing to heat the studio (or the church, as it was), so everybody played with his overcoat on. It was quite a sight to behold—everybody bundled up in scarves and overcoats, some people taking off their outer garments only when we actually recorded. Years later, I prevailed upon Frank Cordell to record his score for *Demon* in Cripplegate Church.

Like Robin Wood, I regard *Demon* as a sketch for the great movie you may one day make. What attracted you to the story?

I was attracted by its outrageousness. I

wanted to connect religion and aliens in a modern story set in a great metropolitan city like New York. I feel the film would have been more commercially successful if the alien creature had been more frightening: perhaps he should have evolved into something more monstrous, more akin to his own life form. Maybe that's what the film lacked in its climactic moments—that one jolt to make you jump out of your seat. This would be something of commercial value. Artistically, I'm satisfied with the picture, particularly the casting, although I did, on the insistence of the producer Edgar Scherek, cut scenes which more clearly explained the Tony Lo Bianco character's aversion to having children. I think too many people were killed by the sniper in the opening sequence: it went beyond the point of usefulness. We also cut a sequence with the alien and the Wall Street bankers that could really have been explored. What would Wall Street do if a Messiah really appeared? What would that do to the economy?

I believe this is the first of your films where 'gaiety' plays a significant part in the narrative.

When I was directing the film, I noted that several of the actors playing those influenced by the alien came off as being gay and I felt sure this would be picked up. It was not my conscious intention, when writing the script and casting the film, that the alien should represent gaiety. Subconsciously, however, I must have known what I was doing, although of course I couldn't have told the people who were putting up the money since we were supposed to be making a strictly commercial film.

In my play *Motive*, which toured in England in 1976 first with Honor Blackman and then Carroll Baker and played in New York with Tammy Grimes under the title *Trick*, there is a gay detective named Creed who attempts to romance and seduce the suspect. This poor fellow is also being blackmailed by a very aggressive hit woman: she has murdered his wife and is now shaking him down for payment. The poor straight protagonist is being assaulted by the woman on one side and the gay man on the other—the two great threats to the modern male. That was treated comically. The concept reappears in *Demon*. But I'm like the spectator, I sit back and look at my work and note the patterns and similarities later.

Why, several years later, did you decide to do a sequel to *It's Alive*?

It's Alive was so successful that a sequel was demanded. It became the number one box-office picture in America and did very well overseas. The relationship between Eugene and Jody in *It Lives Again* is made worse by his ambition. He's a very hyper type of attorney, very intense and very demanding. His wife has given up her career in his favour. There is that kind of tension in the marriage—an inequality. This manifests itself when the couple can't bear to touch each other. They blame it on having given birth to a mutant child, but per-

Larry Cohen

HOLLYWOOD Inside & Out

haps it was the excuse they both needed. The catharsis of saving the child and finally having to kill it themselves in order to save another life seems to bring them together again. The last time we see them they are seeking solace in each other's arms. There is no one on earth who can understand or identify with their feelings and problems. The killing of the baby, perhaps, wipes out the anger between them. As you can see, I take this all very seriously.

You've got to remember that the *It's Alive* picture was originally started when there was a lot of estrangement between children and parents in America. Kids were dressing crazy, wearing their hair in threatening fashion, listening to music that frightened their parents, taking drugs and engaging in sex. Many parents were afraid of their children. A father shot dead his drug-addicted son. So the mutant baby was a symbol of children as complete strangers, frightening their parents and threatening the normalcy of the family.

Why *The Private Files of J. Edgar Hoover*?

I'd always been influenced by those hard hitting crime movies, particularly Warner Bros and Twentieth Century-Fox—*The House on 92nd Street*, *G-Men*, etc. Then, after lots of reading, I realised there was

another side to the FBI—the darker side. I took the idea to the producer Walter Mirisch, and he encouraged me to write the script in the belief that we could get Universal to make the picture. When Universal declined, I took the project to Frank Yablans, who was negotiating a deal with Fox. He wanted to make it with me as his next project: he got his contract and announced he was making a J. Edgar Hoover film but without me. I was angry and determined I would make the picture first, so I went into independent production.

I saw the film as the story of a terribly repressed and lonely man who because of his isolation is able to rise to a position of great power over other people. It's a story of how he attempts to retain that power over fifty years. We used plenty of footage from the old *F.B.I. Story*. I wanted a big old-fashioned score by Miklos Rozsa and to people it with actors who used to appear in those old films. You can't make an FBI movie without Lloyd Nolan. And America's 'top cop' is Broderick Crawford: a symbol of law enforcement since 'Highway Patrol'. He starred in the best political movie I've seen, *All the King's Men*.

Howard Da Silva, as Roosevelt, was effective in showing the side of the President not usually shown on screen.

Our treatment of Roosevelt has been criticised, particularly by Arthur Schlesinger Jnr, though I don't think we treated him badly. He was a sly old politician, who had little respect for the Constitution or the law itself, and he gave Hoover the necessary authority to break the rules. FDR also gave British Intelligence all kinds of American military secrets. He was telling Congress and the American people one thing and doing something completely different. There is distinct evidence that Pearl Harbour

could have been avoided: FDR knew about it and allowed it to happen. He was not aware of the intensity of the attack or the damage that would be done, but he did know there was going to be bombing of Pearl Harbour on 7 December. How can you tell that to the American people in a movie and expect it to make money at the box office?

In the film we are critical of the Democrats and the Republicans. A picture like *All the President's Men* is easy. Everybody wants to hate Nixon, to believe that the *Washington Post* exposed Watergate. But in the movie it is evident that the reporters were handed the information by an anonymous individual. Why doesn't anyone want to know where the information came from? The newspaper doesn't want to examine this because it is happy to have received a Pulitzer Prize. A book by two *Washington Post* reporters who exposed Spiro Agnew stated unequivocally that their information came from the same source that gave Woodward and Bernstein their information on Nixon. We determined in our investigation that in both cases the information came from the FBI. Since the film came out nobody has wanted to follow this up; the last thing the newspapers want is for anybody to start using movies as a form of journalism.

Why did you use much of the framework of the Hoover homage, *The F.B.I. Story*?

The FBI used the motion picture industry as a political tool in public relations. I wanted to take their own form and turn it back on itself by using the same type of photography, music, sets and actors to tell the real story.

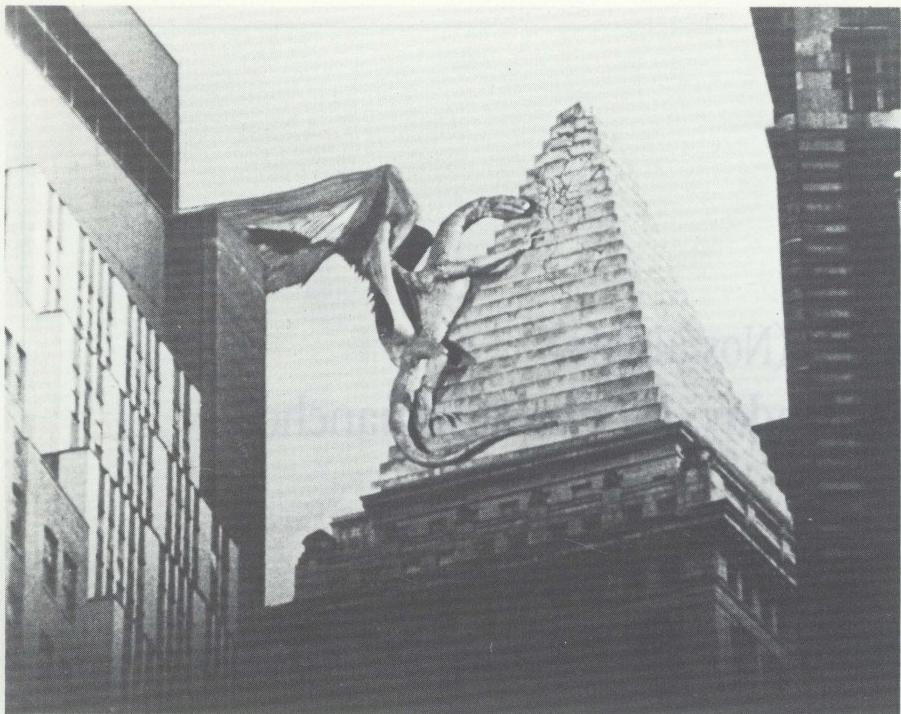
A lot, of course, had to be omitted. We originally planned to have sequences with Hoover blackmailing Joseph P. Kennedy, Hoover warning Roosevelt about Pearl Harbour, about Hoover and the destruction of evidence in the JFK assassination. Hoover strongly believed that Castro had Kennedy killed in retaliation for JFK's attempt to kill him. He believed that if the American people knew that Castro had executed Kennedy, America would have no choice but to go into Cuba. This could have led to Soviet intervention and World War Three. Hoover had little respect for Kennedy anyway and did not think his death was worth going to war over. I believe that all this information will remain suppressed until after Castro's death—at which point there will be no reason for war.

Throughout the film you contend that the American political system is corrupt.

Maybe 'corrupt' is too strong: it is deceiving. What is fed to the public is lies. When you make a movie which tries to tell the truth and brands everybody else a liar, you're going to have a hard time getting the picture before the public. We had deals with NBC and CBS, but the attorneys would not allow it to be shown even in its current form. Viacom, the television syndicate, would not take the picture at all until it was first prepared for networking. But we had a tremendously wide play on cable; it also played extensively in Britain and was screened

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Q It has a god worshipped by a people who perform unspeakable acts in its name. The characters and the human relations are, again, more important than the effects. **J**

Larry Cohen directing *Q—The Winged Serpent*.

by the BBC. It was worth making for those results.

The film lacks a hero with whom we can identify. Webb, Hoover's aide, is the nearest, but in the end even he admits his hypocrisy.

In dealing with American politics, I just couldn't make a film like *Sunrise at Campobello* where all is sweetness and light. Politics is tough and dirty. Webb came through it all: he is a winner. To have waded through all the mud and come out even half-clean is an achievement. Certainly Webb admires some things about Hoover like his conservatism and prudishness. It's almost a protection. Working under Hoover a guy

didn't have to grow up: he could rely on his father.

Does much remain of your original screenplay for *I, the Jury*?

A great deal of the material remains; the excessive violence was put in by the new director. After working on pre-production and directing for the first six days, I was relieved of my duties. Then the budget rose from \$7m to 11m. We wanted to subvert the character of Mike Hammer. He is manipulated by the CIA, becomes a walking weapon pointed in various directions. He never really solves the crime; he's simply moved from point to point by the government specialists who want him to kill on their behalf. He is not much

different from a psychopath who has been programmed by psychiatrists to perform assassinations which look like crimes.

Mike Hammer is known as a great lady's man. We on the other hand introduced the innuendo of a homosexual relationship with his best friend, who is murdered at the beginning of the picture. He learns that his friend is homosexual only when a woman psychiatrist hands him a profile report. It should have been a powerful scene, but they cut the scene in such a way that you didn't really know what was in the report. It was left to your imagination; the impact was lost.

I felt that Mike Hammer had to be updated from the 50s to the 80s. He was no longer a shiny hero but a haunted and tragic man. In the unexpurgated screenplay, he is an ex-alcoholic trying to survive on the candy bars he always carries with him—anything to stop taking that drink. This was eliminated. Alcoholism was a set-up for a scene in which the CIA men pour a bottle of scotch down Mike's throat. This would have been terrifying if the alcoholism had been properly set up: now it misses. In fact, it was later altered to Mike being given an electric shock. For me this was impersonal, whereas the bottle was basic to Mike's problem. He had managed to maintain his willpower and not drink. As a helpless victim, he was being forced to drink; but somehow we know that somewhere in the back of his mind he wants that drink and this is his way of getting it.

Whenever possible, I like to have many levels of motivation. What happens to my characters is always partly their fault. Perhaps they make it happen to them; and if they don't, somehow they feel guilty all the same. All I used from the novel was the opening sequence when his friend is shot and the last scene when Mike kills the woman psychiatrist who was responsible. Mike's dead friend lost an arm in the war. Mike removed the artificial arm from the scene of the murder and in the end uses it to batter the CIA killer to death. This was also cut.

What relation does *Q—The Winged Serpent* bear to your other work?

It has a god worshipped by a people who perform unspeakable acts in its name. The characters and the human relations are, again, more important than the effects. The film was full of little gags, inside jokes. The Michael Moriarty character is a jailbird; his name, Quinn, begins with the same letter as that of the monster Quetzalcoatl; both are 'birds'; the music is reminiscent of Charlie 'Bird' Parker; an Aztec priest performs human sacrifices and Quinn serves human beings to the monstrous bird when he takes two criminals to the top of the Chrysler Building in New York and sends them up into the nest...

The future?

It is always full of surprises. I have a number of screenplays ready to go. Finance, as always, is the key. I am sure, however, I will be making a picture in the next few months. For ten years, I've made a picture every year. ■

1983/4

Wajda's **Danton**

Tarkovsky's **Nostalgia (Nostalghia)**

Truffaut's **Finally, Sunday (Vivement Dimanche)**

1984

Godard's **First Name: Carmen (Prenom: Carmen)**

Pialat's **To Our Loves (A Nos Amours)**

Resnais' **Life is a Bed of Roses
(La Vie est un Roman)**

Schlöndorff's **Swann in Love (Un Amour de Swann)**

Wajda's **A Love in Germany (Un Amour en Allemagne)**

Herzog's **Where the Green Ants Dream**

Ray's **Home and the World (Ghare Baire)**

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REACTION SHOTS



Rear Window: James Stewart, Thelma Ritter.

The New York that Jimmy Stewart sees from his rear window doesn't exist any more, that strangely cosy courtyard full of perfectly framed lives. In *Rear Window*, there are no locked metal grates across the windows and curtains aren't always drawn and people sometimes sleep right on the fire escape, fearlessly exposed. We live differently now, in New York, locked in and hidden, with so little sense of the lives around us that *Rear Window* seems now less a clever thriller about the perils of voyeurism (or movie-going) than a pleasant fantasy of a world that reveals *something* to our eyes, a world where people dance, cry, get drunk and play the piano in full view, each one his own small movie. And by involving himself in other people's stories, the photographer hero may place himself in jeopardy, but he's also widening his vision—enough, eventually, for him to see himself. People are lining up all over New York to see *Rear Window*, perhaps because this isn't just a movie about the dangers of seeing too much, but about the possibility of seeing enough.

The big events of fall 1983—the New York Film Festival and Philip Kaufman's *The Right Stuff*—are moviegoing at its most extreme, tests of the viewer's concentration, endurance and adaptability

TERRENCE RAFFERTY A LETTER FROM NEW YORK

over the course of the 26 wildly disparate programmes crammed into the festival's two weeks and the vertiginous succession of styles and tones in Kaufman's loose, daredevil three-hour epic. The festival, as a whole, is virtually unassimilable, but I'd guess that most people go for two reasons: to scout the new directors and to track the careers of the old ones. This time, something strange happened: the audience seemed to crave straightforward, conservative storytelling, and

they got it most satisfactorily from the younger film-makers—Lawrence Kasdan (*The Big Chill*), Gyula Gazdag (*Lost Illusions*), Jonathan Kaplan (*Heart Like a Wheel*) and especially Diane Kurys (*Coup de Foudre*). The most familiar directors—those whose films excited the highest expectations—seemed markedly less eager to please, challenging the audience to follow them beyond what we thought we knew about them.

There was a trembling, almost fearful, atmosphere at the old-master screenings, expectation giving way to apprehension in the dark, the melancholy feeling of a relationship entering the 'difficult'—perhaps the last—stage, the one in which intimate conversation has become an argument between strangers. Alain Tanner introduced *In the White City* by telling the audience, 'Enjoy the film. If you can!' Either an apology or a challenge or (most likely) both, in any event the expression of an artist no longer quite sure of his bearings in relation to the audience. Many of these films seemed the products of artistic crisis, of the

film-makers' impatience with their own powers, translated into an anxious, almost hostile, attitude towards the audience—as if the artists resented the ease with which an audience borrows their eyes to look at the world. In the most extreme cases—Coppola's *Rumble Fish* and Tarkovsky's *Nostalgia*—the film-makers seem to be daring us to accept their work as pure vision, as if to say: 'This is my way of seeing, without the distraction of content, without ideas. Is this what you wanted?' As it turns out, it isn't. *Nostalgia* and *Rumble Fish* feel like the work of artists at the end of their ropes, getting by on will and style: the two most beautiful, visually dense films in the festival, the emptiest, the most disheartening.

But Bresson's *L'Argent* and Godard's *Passion* were among the festival's triumphs: both Bresson's relentless fable and Godard's graceful *jeu d'esprit* are the work of film-makers so individual, so eccentric that there's no longer any question of anxiety about the audience—if we've followed them this far, of course we'll take this next step, too. Among the new films, these two imposing works were the ones that the rest had to be measured against, but the festival's biggest hit by far was *Rear Window*, seen here for the first time in many years.

Rear Window is a wonderful movie, certainly one of Hitchcock's three or four best, but the ecstatic response to its re-release is just a little disturbing: critics and audiences have been using it as a club to beat the new movies with, and what's the point? After all, in any ordinary week in New York it's likely that at least a couple of great films from the past will be on view in the revival houses and the museums, and staggeringly unlikely that there will be a new masterpiece among the week's releases. But the great thing about moviegoing here is the ability to oscillate between the present and the past, the feeling that everything that is and everything that has been is visible all at once—and that each would mean less without the other. While monitoring the revivals, we're also tracking the trajectories of stars and directors who have given us something valuable in the past, whose histories have become part of ours. We want to know what Tanner's up to now, or Altman, and we should: following the development of an individual voice is a way of humanising the random and impersonal business of moviegoing. It's another way of yearning for a story.

In the White City is, itself, about anticipation—a film of reveries and apprehensions. Paul (Bruno Ganz), an engineer on a freighter, jumps ship in Lisbon, checks into a hotel, wanders the streets, has an affair with the chambermaid, lies in bed, looks out of the window, and shoots super-8 film to send to a woman named Elisa in Germany: he's taking a holiday, which may or may not be permanent, from his own life. This isn't much of a story, clearly, and the pace is very slow—a languid holiday rhythm. The film is all sensations: the feeling of a hotel bar in the late after-

noon, of crowded streets where no one speaks your language, of a sleepless night with curtains blowing into an unfamiliar room, of giggling midday sex that seems like love and, finally, the empty, disgusted feeling of standing at the sink in your hotel room and knowing that you've stayed somewhere too long. Tanner's works are all variations on the theme of freedom, and in this film sensations are the vehicle of his hero's search: Tanner is exploring, through his character, the possibility of a freedom that has nothing to do with ideas, that comes straight in through the eyes, as through the lens of a camera. He shot the film without a scenario, he has said, to avoid 'meaning'—a notion that recalls the words of the stalled, endlessly dissatisfied director played by Jerzy Radziwilowicz in *Passion*: 'Sometimes you don't have to understand; it's enough just to take.'

Paul takes super-8 movies, takes the world exactly as he sees it from his ship, from a Lisbon bus, from the balcony of his room; and the relation of those movies to the story Tanner is telling becomes, strangely enough, the 'meaning' of *In the White City*. Tanner's insertion of super-8 sequences in his film was one of a surprising number of rather self-conscious formal experiments on view at the festival—the red and blue fish which are the only colour elements in the black and white *Rumble Fish*; the blown-up video that gives way to 35mm widescreen halfway through Chantal Akerman's *Les Années 80*; the black and white memory/dream sequences in *Nostalgia*—but Tanner's device is the only one that really works, because its effects keep changing during the film: the grainy, jumpy super-8 images move us in a more complicated way each time they appear.

The sequences seem, at first, no more than a way of breaking the rhythm and texture of the film, of interrupting the smooth flow of day-lit imagery with a rougher, darker kind of vision. Usually, the film just switches in mid-sequence from 35 to super-8, and the difference is dramatic: at the moment of the switch, the image stops being expressive, or even descriptive, and becomes instead subjective, psychological. The sequences don't establish anything, in a narrative sense, but merely repeat and extend what has already been established; they seem to exist only to assert that Paul has seen exactly this—as an attempt to represent

pure and immediate perception, before understanding, before meaning.

But when we see Elisa receiving Paul's movies at her home in the grey Rhine-land, see her watching intently the same flat, uninflected footage we've already seen, our relationship to the super-8 passages changes irrevocably. In a sense, the images lose their innocence at that moment. Watching the films, Elisa is reading Paul through his own eyes; and we begin to see Paul and his movies through hers. We notice, for instance, that the first super-8 reel Elisa receives begins with an image of Paul himself (shot by a shipmate), as a kind of signature, an allusion to the Paul Elisa knows—and that the image of his own face never reappears. We notice how dark sunny Lisbon, the white city, looks in super-8, as if Paul had been followed there by Rhineland clouds. We notice, too, that Paul hasn't bothered to shoot anything interesting: it's just winding streets, a few anonymous people and the view from his hotel window, scenes whose sole interest is that Paul has seen them, exactly like this. From this point on, we see all the super-8 passages as desperate, inarticulate attempts at expression, communication: we're forced, with each new sequence, to ask, 'How would Elisa interpret this? Why is Paul sending her these odd home-movie letters? What, if anything, is he trying to tell her?'

Everything, then, is in a state of suspension, as if no one—not Paul or Elisa or Tanner or the viewer—can go on until something's been resolved, something that takes its own time. This still, unresolved quality evokes memories of earlier Tanner films: the writers in *La Salamandre* waiting for the woman who is their subject to become fully comprehensible; the couple in *Retour d'Afrique* who spend weeks alone in their room preparing for a trip to Morocco they never take; the characters in *Jonah Who Will Be 25 in the Year 2000*, all lying low, awaiting the birth of their personal utopias; the grim wanderers of *Messidor*. In those films, though, the waiting space is filled with ideas, as if it were just a question of adding one final step to an argument and everything would come clear.

The irresolution is more basic here: Paul waits, in Lisbon, for nothing less than the refreshment of his senses, the restoration of his identity in relation to



In the White City: Bruno Ganz.

the physical world. His hotel room, in a sense, serves to ground him with a set of objects—curtains, basin, bed—that become familiar, that he could see, eventually, without even opening his eyes: the room as *camera*, fixing images in his mind, just taking the physical sensations and turning them into memories, the elements of a self. He's waiting, improvising his days, waiting for the movie to start running in his head. *In the White City*'s final image, a super-8 shot that we've neither seen Paul take nor seen Elisa receive, seems to be that movie: it's just waves, the great nothing sea that Paul has spent most of his life wandering on, now an image held, tinged with the Rhineland dark which is—after all—his own, native vision.

Tanner is clearly telling us his own story in *In the White City*. But *Streamers*, the festival's closing night feature, doesn't round Robert Altman's story into a satisfying shape. Altman is both the most eccentric film-maker to work in American commercial cinema since Welles, and a paradigm of the hot American directors of the 70s—Coppola, Scorsese, Mazursky, Ashby, Bogdanovich, Ritchie—who have fallen on hard times, critically and commercially, in the 80s. All these careers are, of course, still in progress, but seem to have been suspended for years, awaiting resolution. Will this be the story of confident, even inspired, early work followed by slow decline into self-parody, failure and finally silence? Or will there be a late surge of strength, a work—or works—that will cast a retrospective light on the dawdling, uncertain works in the middle, that will make them, from the vantage of the happy ending, difficult but necessary stages of a journey?

Streamers is, for Altman, an exercise in concentration, a narrowing of his technique as a director to a few basic elements. Like *Come Back to the 5 & Dime, Jimmy Dean, Jimmy Dean*, it's a filmed play, with a single set—this time, an Army barracks in 1965—and a small ensemble of actors, but *Streamers* is even more confined. In *Jimmy Dean*, the wall mirror behind the counter gave depth to the space, and served to extend the action beyond the moment, into the past; and the blown-up super-16 images gave the film an airy, dreamlike haze. Here, the images are clear, hard-edged 35, and the room's claustrophobia is relieved only

by a couple of small windows that reveal nothing but other soldiers passing by. The soldiers are waiting to be sent to Vietnam, and this dark, low-ceilinged room already seems a kind of bunker, an almost unbearable image of oppressive anxiety. As David Rabe has written it, the world of *Streamers* is even smaller than it looks, for the six main characters—two black privates, two white ones and two old, drunken sergeants—are really three pairs of *Doppelgängers*, just three men with images of what they most fear (death, madness and homosexuality) closing in on them.

The anxiety is unrelieved, and it's largely an institutional anxiety. Each of these soldiers is afraid of more than battle; he's afraid that his real self won't fit the strict, confining role that the Army would squeeze him into. Altman confines himself here, not only to the text of the play, each line spoken crisply, distinctly, sheared off from the lines before and after, but also to just one of his array of visual techniques, his talent for piercing close-ups and slow zooms: those sudden, revealing shots of people *watching* that punctuate all his films. *Streamers* is constructed almost entirely of shots like that, each character thrown back on himself, alone in the middle of the frame, whether speaking or listening—or just looking. This film has nearly as many reaction shots as *Rear Window*, and they convey even more purely the dread of self-knowledge.

In the end, only after the drama's narrow, inexorable stream of consequence has played itself out, Altman's camera finally pulls away, tracking slowly backward between the bunks as the drunken Sergeant Cokes sings, in mock Korean, a song we've heard earlier as 'Beautiful Streamers'. The tune—as the camera puts more and more distance between us and the characters—is 'Beautiful Dreamer', and it evokes ironically the wide, crowded world of *McCabe and Mrs Miller* and its very different ending, the intimate, voluptuously slow zoom that penetrates Mrs Miller's dreaming eye. *Streamers*, like *Images* and *3 Women*, is an intense, self-limiting vision. In the end, it's a relief to see Altman pull back from it.

Once the festival was over, the next great object of anticipation became *The Right Stuff*, but not because everyone was

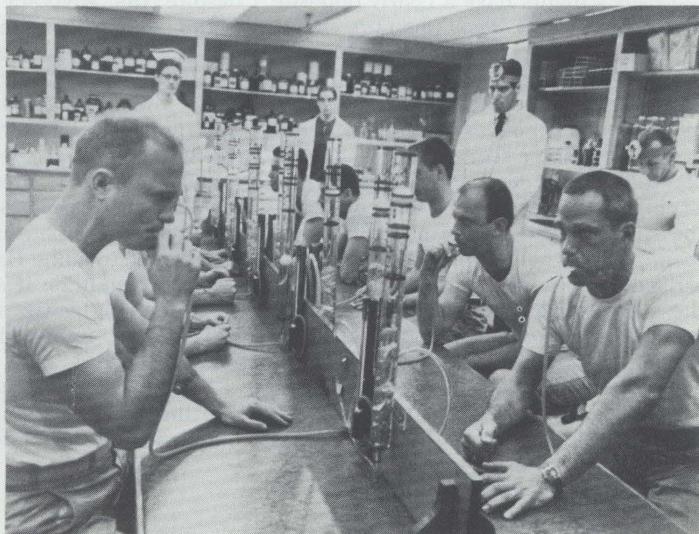
dying for a new Philip Kaufman picture. It's because it's a big, expensive movie, because Tom Wolfe's book about the early days of the American space programme had been a huge bestseller, because the Cold War mentality that fuelled the space race is back with a vengeance, and because John Glenn is running for President. The movie gave off an aura of power, even before it was released: Washington premiere; cover stories in the news-weeklies; daily appearances by the stars, the director, even some of the real-life characters, on television news and interview programmes; and, best of all, a steady stream of 'No comments' from Glenn. With the support of all the awesome machineries of publicity, *The Right Stuff* seemed to have been *launched*, like the massive, ponderous Redstone rocket that took Alan Shepard, briefly, into space. Kaufman's movie doesn't need all that, but the overbearing publicity has an ironic appropriateness: *The Right Stuff* is a loose and funny, casually lyrical, defiantly idiosyncratic picture about staying human while you're riding a big machine.

The big machine that the astronauts of the Mercury programme were riding was, of course, more than the spacecraft itself, the pressures more than just the force of gravity. There were the vast amounts of money spent, the huge crews mobilised for the missions; there was the competition with the mysterious other power, the Soviet Union, to be first and best; there was the burden—thanks to a contract with *Life* magazine—of maintaining the image of perfect, all-American astronaut families; and there was the astronauts' own professional pride as military test pilots, mixed with the implicit derision of legendary pilots like Chuck Yeager (played by Sam Shepard) who didn't just ride in their terrifying machines, but *flew* them.

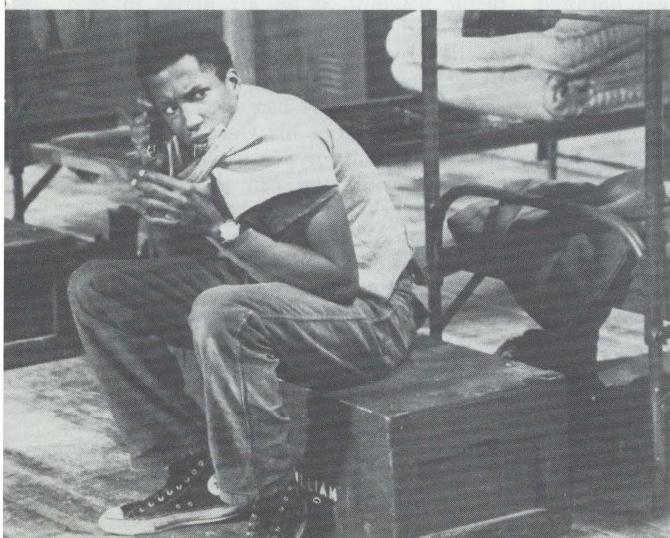
Wolfe's book did a masterly job of identifying the elements of the machine, dramatising the physical and social rigours of the astronauts' mission, and Kaufman's treatment—though necessarily less detailed—reproduces them faithfully, but with a subtle adjustment in tone that makes the film a more complex and satisfying social comedy.

The locus of value in the film, as in the book, is still the rugged individualist Yeager—shot here as a solitary figure, a

Streamers: Michael Wright.



The Right Stuff.



pilot/cowboy out of the frontier past, against magnificent, eerie desert landscapes—but Kaufman's version of the astronauts' stories lacks the contemplative edge of Wolfe. The film acknowledges that the heroic astronaut was largely a media creation, that the astronauts on their space missions weren't true pilots in the Yeager sense, that their function was primarily that of conditioned laboratory animals, monitored for physical response—but Kaufman clearly appreciates their good humour, and the quirky humanity they manage to maintain in the grips of this huge, rather suspect, corporate enterprise seems itself a kind of heroism. It's not surprising that Wolfe, the writer, in solitary control of his creation, should identify exclusively with Yeager; nor is it surprising that Kaufman, the director, with a \$27 million production on his hands, should have a lot of sympathy for the astronauts. He's riding a bigger machine than Wolfe did.

Kaufman's attitude toward the heroic past of American movie-making, like his attitude toward the pressures of the Hollywood machine in 1983, is remarkably unawed. (He had already made original, distinctive pictures out of a retelling of the Jesse James story, in *The Great Northfield, Minnesota Raid*, and a remake of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*.) He just takes it all into the work: desert vistas and lonely *machismo*, out of Ford; crowded scenes of professional camaraderie in sleazy bars, out of Hawks; quick flashes of bureaucratic ineptitude and the inanities of public opinion, out of Preston Sturges; intimate glances and off-the-wall humour in the midst of media chaos, in the manner of Altman. *The Right Stuff* is virtually an anthology of American movie styles, even including the hands-on individualism of the avant-garde: the film crew includes its own Yeager figure in Jordan Belson, who created the serenely lovely visions the astronauts see on their solo flights. The scenes on the ground are so hectic and crowded that we can feel the pilots' relief at being, at last, alone, way above it all, seeing things that no one else is seeing. Their flights are shot to emphasise the astronauts as rapt observers, receivers of visions: Kaufman uses what amounts to a split-screen effect, with the astronaut/subject on one side and the object of vision, the capsule's big window on to the earth, on the other.

Yeager's flights have a nearly opposite rhythm and effect. They're a pure charge of energy and excitement shooting up from the quiet, sparsely populated desert base, and they are shot to emphasise the pilot's activity, not his vision: the dominant shot in these sequences is a close-up of Yeager vibrating madly in his cockpit as the plane approaches, then surpasses, the speed of sound. It's not surprising, then, that the audience—who have arrived in their seats still shaking from the subway, wanting respite from their own gruelling ordeals in the corporate machine—should identify with the astronauts, should want no more (and no less) than a view of the world that is clear, fresh and wide. ■

DOUBLE TAKES

THE DIKLER in his first column files an end of term report . . .

Specialists

To run a specialist cinema in London requires capital, courage and the sort of persistence of hope over expectation that any lifer would envy. The situation does not become easier with experience. The public is not, at the moment, in an adventurous mood, the critics are not always as supportive as they might be and the demon television exerts a stronger and stronger hold. It is now very difficult, for instance, to contemplate buying a European movie for London unless some television deal has been struck or is in the offing. Advertising costs soar but a substantial advertising budget is more and more necessary to attract a reluctant public's attention.

In these circumstances, it is not surprising that 1983 saw the closure of two familiar specialist cinema landmarks—the Paris Pullman and the Electric Cinema Club. What is surprising is the reopening of the Odeon, Chelsea, as the Chelsea Cinema by Artificial Eye, the takeover of the Electric by Mainline and the same company's acquisition of the Sherlock Holmes Centa in Baker Street. That's two down, but three up, as far as 'art houses' are concerned—which leaves a situation nothing like as good as, say, Paris but perhaps rather better than London deserves, given the present level of support. Here is my end of term report on some of the capital's newest and most lively practitioners, upon whom not only Londoners but filmgoers in the regions so much depend where effective choice is concerned.

The Gates: This has proved a better twelve months than 1982 for the energetic David and Barbara Stone of Cinegate. But it would have been a great deal better still if they had got hold of Peter Greenaway's *The Draughtsman's Contract*, which they wanted to show but which slipped through their fingers, despite the advocacy of two national critics who rather unwisely took their part. As it was, Greenaway's film was excellently handled by the BFI itself, for whom film sales executive Carole Myer has proved a tower of energy and strength. She is affectionately known round the festival circuit as everybody's favourite Jewish mother, though there is formidable competition from Barbara Stone and Romaine Hart among British-based distributors. If all three advanced on a foreign bigwig at once, I do not believe that he or she would have a chance in hell.

Anyway, Cinegate, having got over the mortification of seeing Gate Three at Camden, almost next door to the Camden

Plaza of Artificial Eye, fail to attract enough customers from its arch enemy, recovered from the shock to do very well in 1983 by the new British cinema. *The Ploughman's Lunch*, extolled in particular in extraordinary terms by Alexander Walker, did very well at the box-office. And so, to a lesser extent, did Mike Radford's much better *Another Time, Another Place*. And congratulations to the Stones for mounting the complete version of Visconti's *The Leopard* and a revival of Ozu's *Tokyo Story*, to a chorus of just praise. And for having the courage to do the best they could for Scorsese's *The King of Comedy*, which the great British public, hearing that Jerry Lewis was in the cast, decided to ignore. The rivalry between Cinegate and Artificial Eye is legendary, and I wouldn't want to take sides.

But I think it should be said that Cinegate's encouragement of home-grown product is an example to Americans

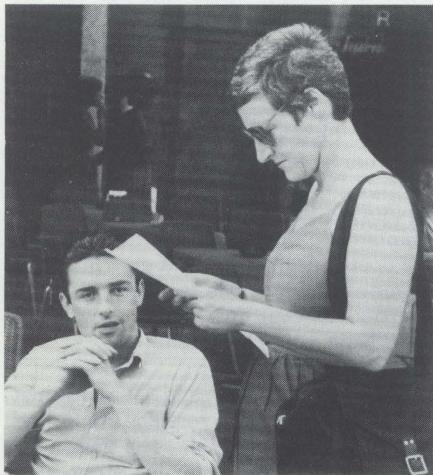


everywhere. And in stark contrast to Artificial Eye's seeming lack of interest, though AE did give a run to Ken Loach's *Looks and Smiles*, despite the fact that it had already been shown on television. Loach apart, however, the British have been studiously ignored.

Artificial Eye: A very encouraging year during which Pam and Andi Engel laid claim to becoming the premier specialist exhibitors in London. The audacious acquisition of first The Lane, Rank's feeble attempt at an art house in the West End, and then the Odeon, Chelsea, as the Lumière and the Chelsea respectively, was the highlight of the period. Of course, Andi Engel has access to rather more boddle from his German business associates than anyone else in this particular market and can thus afford to buy, sometimes sight unseen and on reputation alone, many more films. But who else would have put on Tarkovsky's *Nostalgia*, Syberberg's *Parsifal* and Wenders' direly offputting piece of buff's marginalia, *The State of Things*?

There have been some notable failures, like Bergman's glorious *Fanny and Alexander*, which did not suit the public because so many seemed to suspect that

the old Swedish gloom-merchant was probably at his depressive tricks again. He certainly wasn't. Nor did Robert Altman's nice but ineptly titled *Come Back to the 5 & Dime, Jimmy Dean, Jimmy Dean* do much better. But Güney's *Yol* was a huge success, making Wardour Street scream about Turkish, subtitled movies doing better than the American pap it was putting out in its West End flagships. That was a sound for sore ears. Any moment now I expect *Artificial Eye* to put in a bid for the Odeon, Marble Arch. And who would say that it defi-



Formidable trio: (from left) Barbara Stone, Carole Myer, Romaine Hart.

nately wouldn't be more successful in their capable hands? Andi may be a bit of a curmudgeon at times, but he does mostly know what he is doing, and there is always Pam on hand to supply the charm. She even persuaded a number of reluctant critics to see *Colour of Pomegranates* again because of the much better print, when half of them would easily have taken it on trust, coming from her. **Mainline:** The Screens on the Hill and the Green have had a pretty good year, packing them in for *The Draughtsman's Contract* and before that doing sensational business with the egregious *Diva*. These were blue riband art house successes, exactly analogous in their smaller way to the *Jedis* and *Supermans* of the commercial circuits. And Romaine Hart would probably be the first to admit that she was lucky to get hold of both of them just when her parent company was beginning to get decidedly edgy about its cinema wing. *Querelle*, the very last Fassbinder, did well for her too for a few weeks till the list of those who could spell Genet was exhausted. Each of these films, to use Wardour Street's indelicate phrase, got the bums on the seats, but each left a lot of those bums decidedly cold.

This, actually, is a very curious business. It used to be said that if only the bums would sit on the seats, they would much enjoy what they were offered. Now, it seems, you can by no means be sure of that. Something, perhaps good publicity, persuades people to flock to certain mov-

ies. But they are not always those for which there is excellent word of mouth. The Greenaway film, though adored by some, was clearly hated by many others for its wilful obscurity. Yet audiences not only held up. They kept on increasing. Janet Suzman says it is because everyone in Hampstead felt they had to see the film in order to converse about it at dinner parties. But it wasn't just Hampstead. The regional theatres, bless their more obviously cotton socks, did marvellously too. Not only Hampstead has a lot of dinner parties, of course, but the Suzman theory doesn't seem to be the whole truth. The other half must be all those colour supplement pieces, and perhaps the general expectation that there was going to be a bit more erotica involved than was, in fact, the case.

However, I digress. It was very good news to hear about the Electric and the Sherlock Holmes Centa being acquired by Mainline, though why Ms Hart did



not call them the Electric Screen and the Elementary Screen I don't know. At the time of writing, it hasn't been decided, so perhaps she will. I'm very sorry about the old-style Electric, which gave a whole generation of Londoners a magnificent grounding in good films, even if the print quality was often execrable. But the fact is that the repertory cinema, as opposed to first or second run, has had its day now. There's too much good stuff on Channel 4 and BBC-2 over the average weekend. Why should anyone go out into the darker end of Portobello Road to find a lousy print of the same thing? Still, the programmers at the old Electric deserve a special Dikler's Medal each, and Alan Howden, for many years the best in the business, gets a special minting of the golden variety.

ICA Cinema: Archie Tait and Chris Rodley, assisted with the utmost vigour by Sandy Broughton (the sort of publicity person who makes you feel guilty if you haven't seen each film at the ICA Cinematheque at least twice), are used to scraping the barrel with minimal funds. But it's amazing what you can find in the cinema's bargain basement if you try, as they certainly do. After years of negotia-

tion, for instance, they came up with Hitchcock's *Dial M for Murder* in 3D, and they revived Rossellini's marvellous *The Rise to Power of Louis XIV* during the year too. But they really are interested as well in the latest manifestations of the art of the cinema down there in the Mall, even if their slightly hyperbolic publicity sometimes leads one to expect too much too soon. Certainly their taste is a lot more catholic than that of most of the London critics, though the *Guardian*, *Time Out* and *City Limits* try hard to support them as far as possible. I wish they had more money to spend; but as living examples of money not being everything, Messrs Rodley and Tait deserve thorough commendation.

I couldn't let this overview finish without also praising the Rio, Dalston, enterprisingly funded by both the GLC and Hackney; the Ritzy, Brixton, and the Everyman, Hampstead, for keeping their ends up in 1983 with mostly very intelligent and enterprising programming. But a loud raspberry to the Barbican Cinema, which doesn't seem to know what it is doing month to month, and whose publicity agents hardly seem to care. Must do better, I'd say. Otherwise, are we in general lucky or not in our specialist cinemas? My verdict is that we get more than we deserve and had better support them harder if we don't want other casualties like the Electric and the Paris Pullman by the end of 1984.

Afrikaans

Derek Malcolm, film critic of the *Guardian*, tells me that plans for a season of Afrikaans films at the National Film Theatre are well in hand and that, as yet, there have been no strong objections. He adds that he hopes to show up to twenty films, going back to the 1920s. Viewers can make what they like of them, but the purposes of the season are, for him, twofold. The first is to show that there has been a thriving industry in South Africa for as long as there has been in this country, which even many South Africans do not appreciate. The second is to allow people to see exactly how the present system of apartheid developed, from the paternalism of the past.

But are the films any good, I ask myself. 'Yes,' he says. 'Some of them are, and almost all of them are very revealing. People tend to forget that apartheid is not very old and sprang from history rather than some evil genius or other. I hate the thought of it, but we ought to think about its root causes.'

Malcolm, who has visited the multi-racial Durban and Cape Town festivals in South Africa, and thinks that the 'brave liberals' who run them should have all the support we can give them, says that the general effect of the cultural boycott has been to encourage conservatives and incipient supporters of the

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John Piper

DOUBLE TAKES

regime to go there but to discourage others, and thus further isolate those attempting change. He says that the festivals are at risk without such support, and they provide the only venues for unsegregated audiences to see films. He also comments that the very people, or some of them, who refuse Durban and Cape Town their films, cheerfully sell them to South Africa, to be shown in segregated cinemas. He has a point there, but I wonder if he is not kidding himself about the amount of change actually achieved by film festivals anywhere, most of all in South Africa? Couldn't the South African Government merely regard Durban and Cape Town as suitably innocuous window-dressing?

scant resources if *Privileged* is anything to go by, will make the film under its auspices—if, that is, something worthwhile actually turns up. I hope it does.

I see from the form sent to would-be entrants, who have to be 26 or under on 31 January 1984, that there are some interesting guidelines for beginners. 'Do not rely too much on dialogue' is one of the first tips. No doubt some wag will take this literally and send in a blank page, save for shooting instructions, or a bucket of water entitled *Thames Silent*. Seriously, though, I'm not at all sure about the sample scene laid out for the hopefuls. Here it is:

Int. Living Room. Evening.

The doctor picks up a jacket from the chair. Ian opens the door for him.

DOCTOR: Thanks for the coffee.

IAN: Thanks for your time.

DOCTOR: Maybe you ought to consider her moving to the nursing home.

Ian gives him a non-committal gesture. The doctor decides to let it go. He smiles attempting to ease the tension.

DOCTOR: It's your decision.

IAN: Thank you. Goodnight.

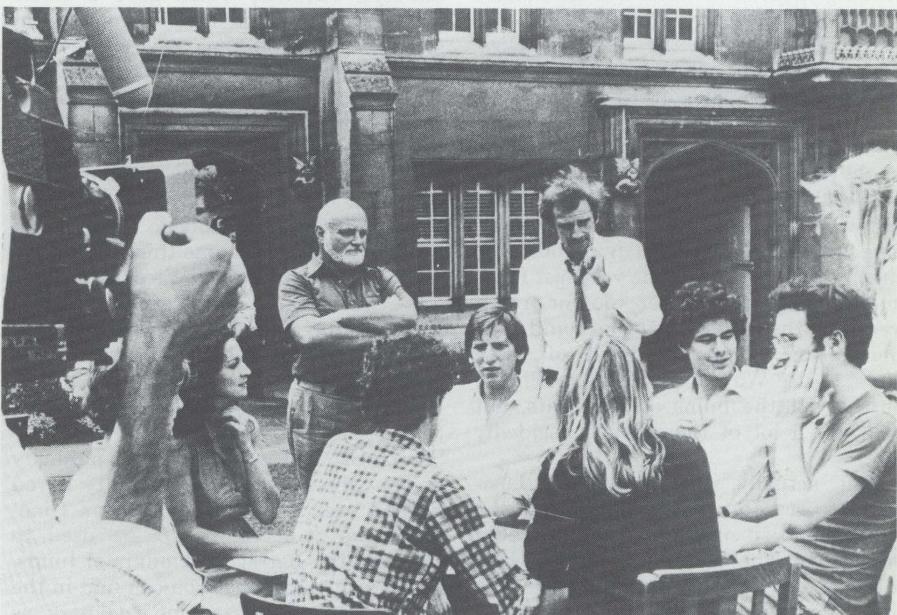
DOCTOR: Goodnight.

Ian closes the door and leans against it. He walks slowly across the room and sits beside a small table. His gaze goes slowly around the room. He stops at a picture.

Ever since I read this, I've been trying to figure out the next line, for which entries will be accepted from those who are 26 on February 31st (Prize: a small Nat West overdraft). My own entry will be either: 'Ian: The beggar's gone off with my jacket.' or 'This is a picture of David Puttnam. What has he got to do with my mother, I wonder?'

But let us not mock too much. It is a good idea, and congratulations to both Lloyds and the OFF.

THE DIKLER



John Schlesinger on an Oxford location of *Privileged*.

Nearly ten years after *The Travelling Players* introduced a new radical phase of Greek cinema to audiences around the world, there is once again a wary optimism among the Greek film community and a younger generation of film-makers beginning to make its mark. Hopes are centred on a comprehensive new film law, due to reach parliament during the current session, which will confirm the PASOK government's commitment to building a national cinema culture out of the ruins of the film industry. Support for the new Greek cinema has been on the agenda for many years, but the initiative to draw all sections of the industry into a formal structure as a pre-condition for dramatically increased state subsidy to production came, not surprisingly perhaps, from Melina Mercouri, in her current role as Minister for Culture and Science.

That there is still a Greek cinema to support may be due to the invariable practice of subtitling foreign films, rather than dubbing, which would be uneconomic for a population of eight million. Only this, it seems, could have pushed *E.T.* to tenth place among the most popular films of last season. But when one discovers that by far the most successful film of the year was an unflinching tragedy of homosexual passion and transvestite prostitution, Giorgios Katakouzinos' *Angel*, it becomes clear that Greek enthusiasm for Greek cinema is made of sterner stuff. In fact, some 20–30 Greek productions each year account for nearly one third of all metropolitan attendances; while up to 150 US imports yield only a slightly larger share of attendances, with other, mainly Italian, imports making up the remaining third. In rural areas, Greek films account for fully half of all attendances.

Yet the audience is a mere fraction of the 135 million that continued as late as 1967, the year of the colonels' coup. The following year saw the beginning of a national television service and, within a mere four years, attendances and production levels had plummeted. It was at this low ebb that Angelopoulos' first feature, *Reconstruction*, appeared, with its oblique challenge to the junta's repressive rule. And throughout the remaining four years of the dictatorship, the new Greek cinema emerged as a vital component of the gathering resistance movement. The Thessaloniki Film Festival became a 'battleground', in the words of one critic, with militant students occupying the upper galleries of the tiered auditorium and hurling taunts at the bourgeois audience below, while police waited to pounce at the exits. *The Travelling Players*, begun during the

dictatorship and premiered at Thessaloniki in 1975, triumphantly reappropriated the repressed history of the bitter years of occupation and civil war.

No Greek film since, including Angelopoulos', has enjoyed similar international prestige. Instead, with growing support from the Greek Film Centre, founded in 1970 as a branch of the Industrial Development Bank, a controversial indigenous art cinema has developed, producing between five and fifteen films each year, while non-subsidised production now consists only of cut-price vernacular comedies and pornography. Much of this art cinema is frankly parochial and self-indulgent to a degree which makes the continued attention of both audiences and critics surprising, to say the least. Partly, it appears that there is underlying support for almost any Greek cinema; but the film-makers have also been highly successful in dramatising their predicament and becoming a genuinely newsworthy feature of the cultural scene. One critic tells how, when he and some others ventured early criticism of this new wave, the film-makers hit back with a barrage of abuse, even posting the names of the critics on cinema doors as 'enemies of Greek cinema'. The result, to an outsider, is a remarkable tolerance of rampant egotism and hamfistedness, alongside some truly impressive achievements.

From the film-makers' point of view, however, it must be said that the Greek Film Centre's average of 20–30 per cent subsidy and the virtual absence of any genuine commercial production partners—including, until very recently, television—has forced them not only to become their own producers (as well as writers), but to invest their own money and unpaid labour. One typical assertion: 'When I have to scrape together more than half the budget myself and each film may be my last, I'm going to make sure that the film says exactly what I want it to say.' The 'cinema of personal expression' is, to some extent, born of chronic underfunding and insecurity.

It is against this background that the new film law has been drafted, in close consultation with the unions and professional associations, and its chief architects, Mercouri's adviser on cinema, Manos Zacharias, and the head of the Greek Film Centre, Pavlos Zannas, are adamant that its first concern is to stabilise and promote production. According to Zannas: 'The basic idea is that the 30 per cent tax collected from all films shown in Greece must go back to the film industry and to film culture. One part will go back to the producers in propor-

tion to the number of tickets sold for their films. Another small part will go to the cinemas, who are having a hard time at present. We want to help cinema-owners stay in business, but they will only receive this aid if they meet certain projection and sound standards and show an agreed number of weeks of Greek films. 60 per cent of the remainder will go directly to the Greek Film Centre, which will be entirely responsible for selective aid to production and for the promotion of all Greek films abroad. The rest of the tax yield will be used by the Ministry of Culture for a range of tasks, such as the creation of a National Film Archive, to supplement the existing private foundation; to support our film clubs and improve their programming; and to encourage the development of film studies in colleges and universities. We urgently need a higher school of cinematography, but this will require further negotiation with the Ministry of Education.'

Thus Zannas, an ex-critic and literary scholar who helped to start the Thessaloniki Festival in 1960, and Zacharias, a civil war veteran who spent many years as a director and administrator at Mosfilm Studios before returning to Greece after the dictatorship, have provided the legislative shape of a film policy that combines features of many other European systems into a form which they believe will inaugurate a new stage of development of the cinema that was born of resistance to the colonels.

Despite PASOK's close identification with the new law, Zannas denies that the party has any wish to influence the content or style of film-making. 'Melina wants to encourage all kinds of cinema; and in fact our recent co-productions have been fiercely attacked by both the right and the left in about equal numbers.' But even if there is no discernible party line among recent films, there is a distinct cultural climate that clearly owes much to PASOK's backing for popular culture, the new freedom it has granted to discuss the forbidden 40s and the fierce dialectic between left and right in Greek politics.

Indeed the opening film of the 1983 Thessaloniki Festival, Kostas Ferris' *Rembetiko*, had all the hallmarks of an epic ideally suited to the times—not least in respect of its 40 million drachma budget, the highest for any Greek film to date. Its story of a poor musician's daughter, who survives the traumatic evacuation from Smyrna to become a famous rembetika singer, is loosely based on the actual career of Marika Ninou, who died in 1956 after returning from an American tour. *Rembetika* music

When the Greeks...

Ian Christie

originated in the urban sub-culture of prostitution and hashish dealing which, together with its characteristically intense minor-key laments for lost love, has led to comparisons with American blues. After years of attempted suppression by successive right-wing governments, under PASOK it is enjoying widespread revival and promotion as a part of the authentic Greek popular culture. Accordingly, Ferris' 150 minute film boasts specially written music by a leading composer, Stavros Xarhakos, lyrics by the poet Nikos Gatsos and, by Greek standards, sumptuous production values. But it also suffers from mixed motives in a way that is all too common in the most recent crop of Greek films.

If the intention was to combine an oblique 'reinstatement' of history as seen from the margins of society—born in 1917, Marika is literally a child of the colonial adventure in Asia Minor that ended in the 'Great Disaster' of 1922, when over a million refugees flooded back into Greece—with a revival of the backstage melodrama, the result is something of an uneasy compromise. Only the extended musical numbers, which show the gradual commercialisation of *rembetiko*, are an unequivocal success. But even though Ferris is clearly no Sirk in his handling of the emotional set-pieces of Marika's career, the film may yet benefit from re-editing, since enough footage was shot to enable it to become Greece's first feature-cum-TV mini-series.

All seven competition entries at Thessaloniki, representing the Greek Film Centre's 1983 investment (with one exception), were marked by a distinct appetite for commercial success. In some cases this took the form of more or less unsuccessful genre pieces, like Dimitris Stavrakis' sub-Melville *Misunderstanding*, or Giorgos Stamboulopoulos' *Caution Danger*, a turgid melodrama of rural mayhem laced with incest and perfunctory political justification. Others tried to translate the political concerns of recent years into conventional narratives, with even less success: *Underground Passage* suggested implausibly that a compromised minister in some future PASOK-type government might precipitate another military takeover; while *Homecoming Song* took a view at once sentimental and sanctimonious of those who had stayed at home and prospered under the colonels' regime through the eyes of a returned exile. Significantly, the only new film to tackle the lifestyle of youngsters who have grown up since the fall of the dictatorship, Nikos Vergitsis' *Revenge*, was by far the best and, with *Rembetiko*, collected most of the prizes. *Revenge* falls squarely within the cinema of personal expression—our hero wakes up during an earthquake and decides to transform his life completely, starting with his best friend's girlfriend and ending in a *ménage à trois*—but is redeemed by its sharp, cynical performances, which convey a credibility, both sexual and political (rejection of puritanical

communist upbringing!), largely missing elsewhere.

But if many of the new films seemed to be striking out in misguidedly conventional directions, a sampling of the two previous years' output revealed some remarkable and varied achievements, suggesting that the hiatus may only be temporary. Tassos Psaras' *The Factory*, *When the Greeks . . .*

shown at Locarno in 1982, is a modest yet rare example of concrete political cinema. It shows concisely how the proprietor of a small-town tannery is forced out of business by, indirectly, Greece's entry into the EEC and the accompanying economic upheaval. This portrait of a petty tyrant crushed by forces far beyond his comprehension gives a remarkable

Love Wanders in the Night (1983) is a film by Dimitris Stamboulopoulos. It is a tale of a man who returns to his village after many years away, only to find that his wife has left him. He tries to win her back, but she has moved on. The film is set against a backdrop of traditional Greek music and dance.



Love Wanders in the Night.

insight into the profound changes which are taking place in Greek society—admirably summarised in the opening programmes of Terry Doyle's recent BBC television series, *Greek—Language and People*—but are still inadequately reflected in the new Greek cinema. At the opposite end of the scale, so to speak, Stavros Tornes' *Balamos* is an intensely

personal vision of myth and history combined in a mystical journey through time. The title is apparently a gypsy word for one who lives in a dream, and the filmmaker himself plays the wanderer whose decision to buy a horse leads him out of the present and into a mythical mystery tour of ancient and mediaeval times. An impressive and highly original film about

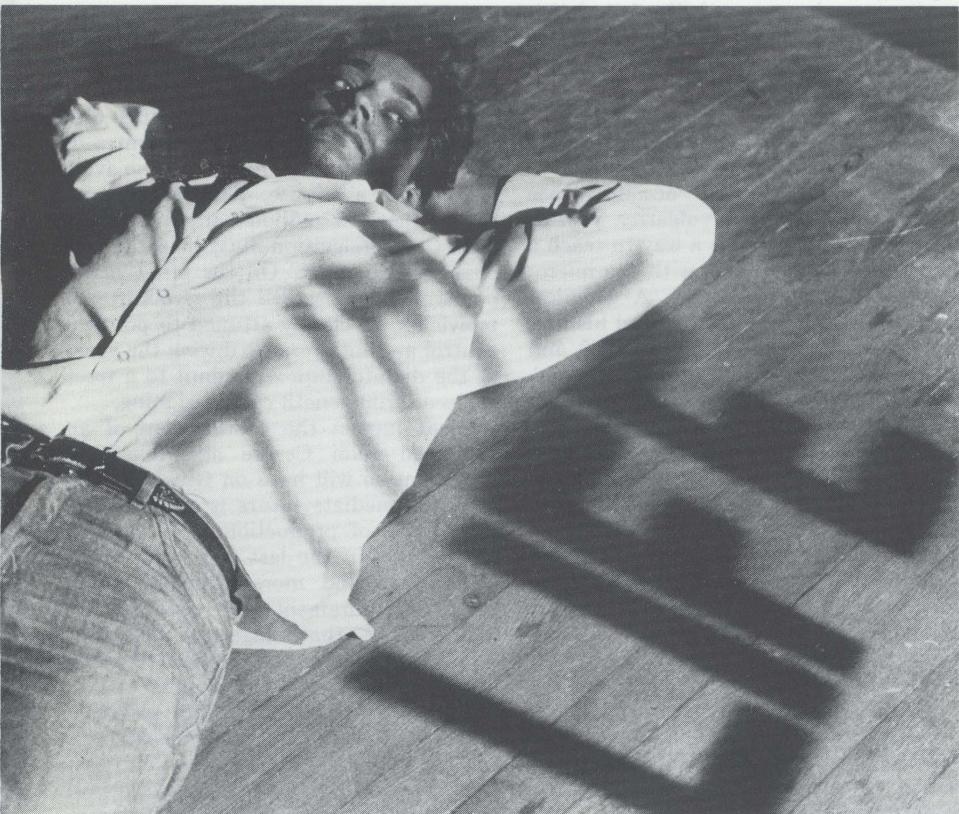
Revenge.

the presence of the past in the interstices of the present.

Somewhere between these extremes lies Lakis Papastathis' film *When the Greeks . . .*, which, in many ways, fulfils the agenda for a cinema of national definition (and demystification) that has been proposed closer to home by Colin McArthur in the *Scotch Reels/Myths* debates. In a series of painterly tableaux, the film records the discovery of an authentic Greek landscape and culture through the eyes of a rich young bourgeois held to ransom by a group of nationalist bandits at the end of the 19th century. But it is more than an anthropological guided tour: in a double movement, the captive's letters to his wife reveal his growing understanding of the integrity of a tradition that stretches back beyond the Ottoman period, while the bandit leader gradually reaches the conclusion that he must leave his band and join the ranks of the new national army. And this historic compromise is further framed by the inclusion of tinted fragments from an early Greek silent film celebrating the exploits of the female bandit leader, Maria Pentayotissa, who joined the army of Queen Amalia and so weakened the tradition of armed autonomy. Papastathis' luxuriant primitivism recalls the Syberberg of *Karl May* and, like that underrated film, opens up a potentially vast field of investigation into the late 19th century invention of the modern state, the processes of 'symbolic appropriation' (discussed by McArthur in *Scotch Reels*, p. 41ff) and the cultural apparatus of cinema.

These latter theoretical concerns are also present in two of the most ambitious recent Greek films: Christofis' *Rosa* and Rentzis' *Electric Angel*. *Rosa pour sauver le rêve*, in its more evocative French title, is a polyglot reflection on dreams of revolution and, perhaps, on the subversive potential of dreams, set in a Trieste pension that was once frequented by Rosa Luxemburg, during the junta's rule. Daniel Olbrychski's virtuoso performance as a Polish refugee tends to dominate what is anyway something of an overloaded ark of symbolic characters and allusions, but the film has great density and energy in its parts, if a wilful obscurity overall. *Electric Angel*, the third of Thanassis Rentzis' idiosyncratic collage films (he is the editor of *Film*, one of the two serious Greek cinema journals), is rather more uneven, with only a minority of its sketches and animation sequences on the theme of eroticism achieving a real impact. But again, Rentzis' use of the cinema apparatus to explore forms of popular representation—from traditional Greek shadow puppets, through engravings and postcards, to modern photo-comics—is proof of an intellectual vitality at work in the new Greek cinema.

What's it like to be a young film-maker in Greece today? To find out, I talked to two writer-directors each of whom is preparing a third feature after achieving



Revenge.



Rembetiko.

When the Greeks...

some critical and public recognition for films that are at a tangent to the main direction of their contemporaries. Frieda Liappa's *Love Wanders in the Night* (shown in the 1982 London Festival) is the only Greek film I have seen that deals directly with the position of women in what is still a highly patriarchal society. Equally unusual are Vassilis Vafeas' comedies of everyday confusion, *The Eastern Periphery* and *Day Off*.

Frieda Liappa's first feature was inspired by a newspaper story about two sisters who had committed suicide in their late thirties. She imagined that they came from a small town to Athens after the death of their uncle and lived claustrophobically in their apartment, nourished by their mutual infatuation for a cousin, who is a painter living in Paris. When this weak and egotistical character returns unexpectedly, their equilibrium is shattered and one goes off with him, while the other commits suicide. Not surprisingly, it transpires that Frieda Liappa has been strongly influenced by psychoanalysis, and the film's dreamlike quality, its fragmented sense of time, long takes and extended night sequences, combine to create a remarkable insight into female sexuality. 'The night is what we always thought of; it lies outside our consciousness as something terrible, uncertain, something we are afraid of and, at the same time, it is "the dark point of desire", a promise of pleasure.'

In the context of Greek cinema, *Love Wanders* has the effect of a reverse shot, showing the usual male hero from the women's point of view; and although the sisters appear dependent on their cousin, they are in fact more secure in their identities than he. Liappa disclaims any close connection with the women's movement, but her analysis is unequivocally feminist. 'I believe that the male has had it socially, but not as a source of pleasure, as a body that desires and is desired—especially in this film, which deals with the nostalgia of an adolescent that struggles to exist outside the layers of his social function, and which is the body that both women want. My two women living in utter frustration have somehow preserved their own sexuality.'

In both *Love Wanders* and a telefilm made the following year, *Rainwater*, about a father and daughter's relationship, Liappa is concerned with 'the psychic structures of Greek society' and, unlike most of her contemporaries, she deliberately avoids the explicitly political or social. Duras she cites as a continuing influence, although American classical cinema was her first enthusiasm as a critic in the early 70s. She feels that there is a marked tendency towards more commercial subjects but that Greek films are becoming increasingly academic. 'They are no longer trying to oppose, which was the origin of the new Greek cinema, instead they're trying to join in and have their films earn money and be distributed abroad—but this only leads to making films that look like poor copies of other

people's.' Having only now finished paying off her debts on *Love Wanders*, for which she had to raise personally 50 per cent of the 6 million drachma budget, she is planning an ambitious futuristic version of Euripides' *Bacchus*, 'which should enable me to see where I stand between cinema and myth.' Above all, she values her independence and sees the new film law as a vital step 'to protect the opportunity to make personal films'; and if it further confirms the growing monopoly of the Film Centre in cultural production, 'that is a necessary evil'.

Comedy in Greek cinema has long since been largely left to the residual commercial sector and, by all accounts, has plumbed new depths of vulgarity. Vassilis Vafeas believes it offers a way to reach a large public and to deal with the micro-structures of everyday life. A chemical engineer by training, he financed his first feature entirely by himself in 1979 and made good use of his industrial experience to show an almost surreal view of Greek mismanagement contrasted with American overmanagement in this two-episode film. *Day Off*, a Film Centre coproduction, logically enough deals with the tribulations of a day spent on assorted minor errands in Athens, which reduces its hero to bewildered apathy. Inevitably, the two films have invited comparisons with Tati, whom Vafeas greatly admires; but he observes that much of his humour is verbal, unlike Tati's, and that it is specifically about 'the strange way our language works: through their speech, Greeks are always trying to escape something or get the upper hand over someone else.'

Even without a grasp of such idiomatic subtleties, the films are often painfully funny and correspond closely with a visitor's impressions of Greek social organisation. Vafeas feels that comedy is the only way to be both popular and personal, and his next project—having benefited from one of the Film Centre's new script advances—will be with a very well-known comedian, which he hopes will help it break through the art-cinema barrier. When pressed on the likely effects of the new law, he admits that he doubts the wisdom of trying to cater for all kinds of cinema, including the 'self-defeating' independent or avant-garde variety. He feels that the audience's taste is rapidly being debased by a flood of high-gloss yet totally undemanding television programmes—and he is in a position to do something about it, as a member of the Second Channel's Programme Committee.

Greece's second channel was until recently run by the armed forces and, since its 'demilitarisation', it has been searching for an identity and seeking to build up its independent resources. 'There was only one 16mm camera in the whole station and only 250 staff, compared with over 3,000 at the first channel,' according to Vafeas. With prodding from him and others on the new advisory

committee, the channel has plans to embark on an extensive programme of co-productions (with the Film Centre), pre-purchases and direct commissions from independent film-makers.

The logic of this concern to sustain feature production is familiar and especially acute in Greece: 'We have 250 feature film transmissions each year on the second channel alone, of which 100 are Greek films; but because these are in such short supply, we have to show some films up to four times in a year. Television actually makes most of its advertising revenue from feature film transmissions, with up to 15 minutes of commercials. So if you multiply the average cost of a minute, 400,000 drachma, by 15 that's 6 million earned by each film. Greek television must help the cinema to help itself.' On the other hand, one wonders how well the structures of television, so closely attuned to political control and interference during the years of the dictatorship, will adapt to a freer ethos of arms-length commissioning.

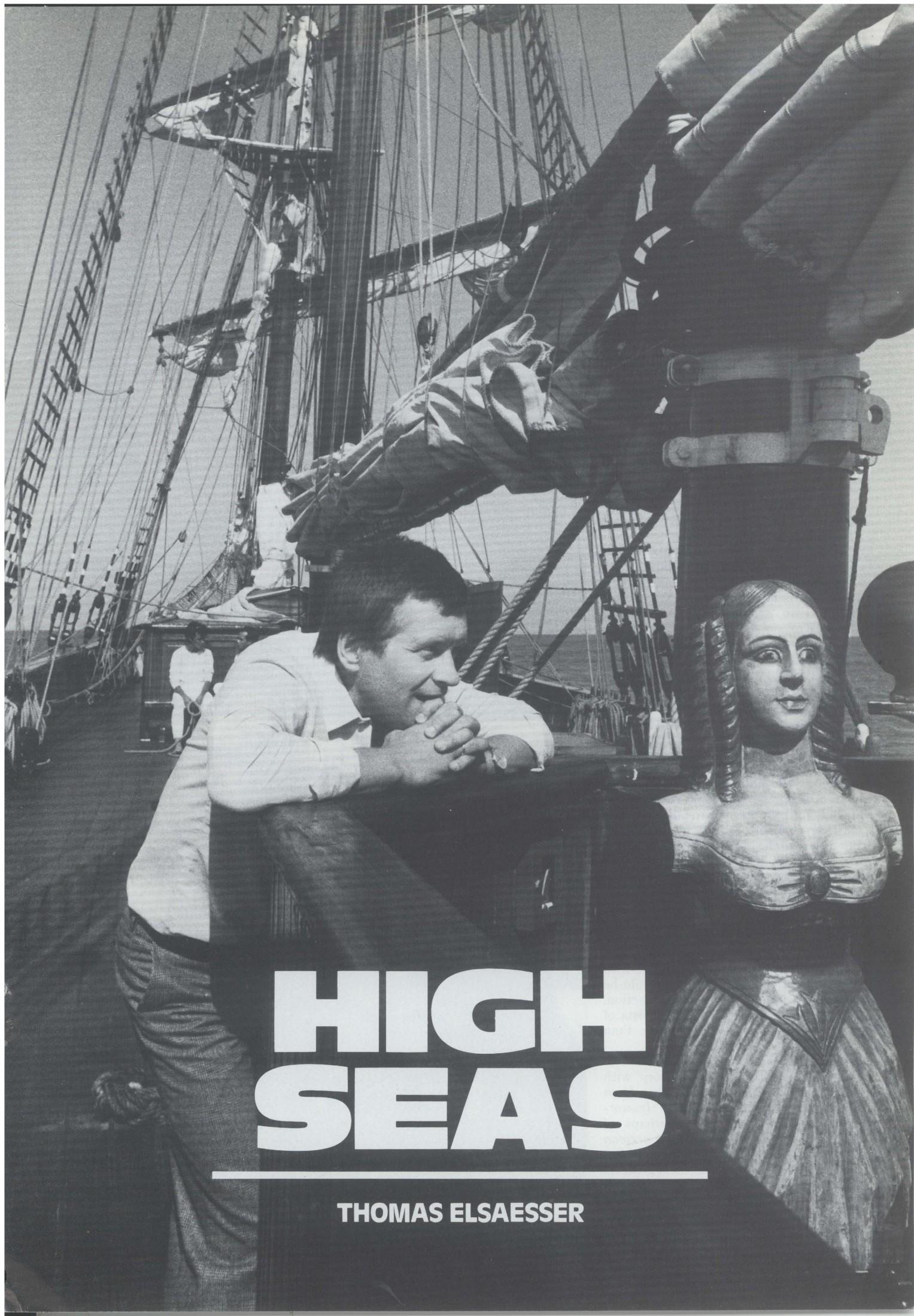
What impact the combination of an enhanced Film Centre and television participation will have on Greek cinema in the immediate future is hard to predict. Costs of production have risen so sharply within the last two years—high stock costs and more stringent union crewing requirements are cited as the main factors—that budgets of 15–20 million drachma are now needed to make even relatively modest 'personal' films. Many film-makers and critics privately deplore the growing commercialisation of the 'new cinema' movement and feel that opportunism and an empty technical sophistication (especially in cinematography) are squandering achievements of the early years. A retrospective of the late flowering Greek neo-realism of the 50s and 60s at Thessaloniki was an occasion for much heartsearching among film-makers and critics alike.

Pavlos Zannas sees the current phase as a reaction against the dominant example of Angelopoulos on the part of younger film-makers, who have emerged since 1974 into Greece's belated liberalisation, and are still floundering in the freedom to discuss politics, the civil war, sex and all the taboos of the dictatorship. With the Film Centre's budget increased from 80 to 200 million drachma, he believes that film-makers will feel less pressure to play safe and put everything into each film—'there must be room to experiment and to fail.'

It may be significant that Europe's other new socialist government in Spain has also recently announced far-reaching plans to revitalise Spanish cinema at home and abroad. For Euro-socialists at least, national culture is a high priority and cinema (including the higher band of television fiction) is well on the way to becoming 'the most important art'. ■

Many of the films discussed here will be shown in a season of Greek cinema at the NFT in April, and subsequently at BFI-supported regional cinemas.

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HIGH SEAS

THOMAS ELSAESSER

Search the mind about Rotterdam, and what do you find? The biggest port in Europe, the spot market in oil, once in a while news of a spectacular drugs bust. And since 1972, the annual Rotterdam festival, haven for avant-garde, independent and Third World films.

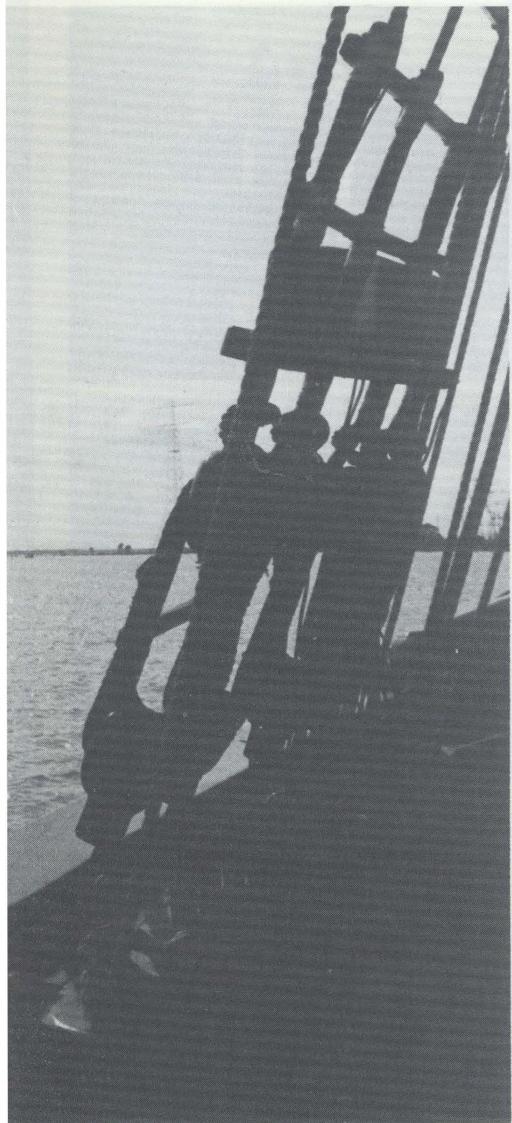
Rotterdam, 14 May 1940. The old town is practically wiped out by a German air attack. The fire is so fierce that even the canals are burning. Newsreel footage shows a lion calmly walking the streets, a refugee from the bombed-out zoo. Three years later, Allied bombers inflict more damage; and in 1944, already retreating, the German army mines the port and blows up more than four miles of docks and almost a quarter of the warehouse capacity. Today, the rebuilt centre of Rotterdam resembles nothing more than the rebuilt centre of any West German provincial capital: banks, pedestrian shopping streets and mournfully empty trams circling in front of the railway station.

The reverberating ironies of the city's history have not escaped Edgardo Cozarinsky, author of the much acclaimed *One Man's War*. He has recently been making *Volle Zee (High Seas)*, shot mainly on location in Rotterdam and Amsterdam. But despite bizarre newsreel images and the choice of a country which can certainly contribute an oblique angle to recent European history, Cozarinsky's latest film is not *Rotterdam, Open City*. Nor is it an 'archive film', as was *One Man's War* or the 'do-commentary' he has just completed for the Paris Institut National de l'Audio-Visuel (INA) as a contribution to the forthcoming centenary of Jean Cocteau's birth. *High Seas* is a fiction film, a fantasy, one man's adventure on a journey of self-discovery or possibly self-destruction.

A Swiss insurance salesman finds himself in Rotterdam with his wife. After a quarrel at the hotel, they tour the harbour. Among the container vessels, tugs and oil tankers the hero spots a three-masted schooner, rocked by the wash. But what catches his eye is the figure in the rigging—a woman with flowing red hair. She becomes the mystery and the obsession for whom he gives up wife, job and firm land. Who is she? 'The Flying Dutchwoman', as the production team jokingly calls her? An international arms dealer hovering offshore in a deceptively nostalgic craft? A bored rich widow with a weakness for handsome would-be sailors? Or simply the hero's projection, to compensate for a life that consists of guaranteeing against risks rather than taking them?

It is unlikely that the film will want to give a clear answer. As a story with sailors, and a European art film, *High Seas* makes one think of Welles' *Immortal Story*, of Demy, even perhaps of Fassbinder. In Wenders' *The American Friend*, the Dennis Hopper character has a tag line to the effect that he is going to bring the Beatles back to Hamburg. Edgardo Cozarinsky, if pressed, might say that it is the spirit of Baudelaire or Rimbaud, of 'Invitation au Voyage' or 'Le Bateau Ivre' that he hopes to find in





Insurance salesman in Rotterdam:
Andrzej Seweryn.

Edgardo Cozarinsky
(right) with cameraman
David Claessen.

Photos:
Hajo Piebenga.

La Capitaine: Willeke van Ammelrooy.



Rotterdam. 'If I wanted to be intellectual,' he says, 'I'd mention Karen Blixen. She was a much loved author when I grew up in Argentina. But actually, it's the memory of those Tay Garnett films from the 30s and 40s—*Her Man or Seven Sinners*—which gave me the idea of trying something that is simple, almost archaic, and at the same time suggestive of the images and emotions that filled our adolescence, when it was easy to grow restless after seeing a film and hunger for more.'

Is he thinking of Technicolor matinées, Gregory Peck holding Ann Blyth in *The World in His Arms*, or Tourneur's *Ann of the Indies*? 'Everyone can bring his own favourite fantasies, the film won't get in the way of them, but I'm not aiming for a pastiche or a remake of anything. On the high seas, your sense of the horizon changes, and in the cinema anything is possible beyond the frame. I think of *La Capitaine*, which is what the woman is called in the film, as neither young nor old, but ageless. She's played by Willeke van Ammelrooy, an actress very well known in Holland. She was recently in Raoul Ruiz's *On Top of the Whale*. For one of the other female parts I wanted a kind of younger Lotte Lenya, to suggest something of a Pirate Jenny atmosphere; luckily, they found me an actress from the opera, Cristina Hoving, who is in fact a completely different type, but as I now realise just right for the part. The one choice I absolutely insisted on was for the male lead to be played by Andrzej Seweryn, a Polish actor now working in Paris. He has a quite remarkable screen presence, and the film was very much conceived with him in mind.'

Since coming to Paris, Seweryn has mainly acted in the theatre. He was in Patrice Chéreau's *Peer Gynt*, a production of Bulgakov's *Master and Margarita*, and is currently rehearsing for the new Peter Handke play which Wim Wenders originally directed in Austria. He has worked with Andrzej Wajda both in Poland and in France. He was an officer of the secret police in *Man of Iron*; he played in *The Conductor* and had a part in *Danton*. He speaks French with great assurance, though there will be a moment in *High Seas* when, as a naturalised Swiss, he will revert to his native Polish. 'But it's not going to be a political gesture or refer to recent events. The character I am playing is in search of freedom, and that is a very general concept. He has come to a dead end in his life, so he needs to explore himself in different ways. Being hired as a sailor by *La Capitaine* is a bit like the Forest of Arden or the Sea Coast of Bohemia in Shakespeare. Not a real place, but in the imagination.'

High Seas is a Franco-Dutch co-production. By another deliberate and perhaps provocative irony, the French contributions—the director and the male star—are thus an Argentinian and a Pole. INA will mainly act as distributor in France and also hold television rights. All the other actors and the crew are Dutch, as are the executive producers and the production company. The dialogue will

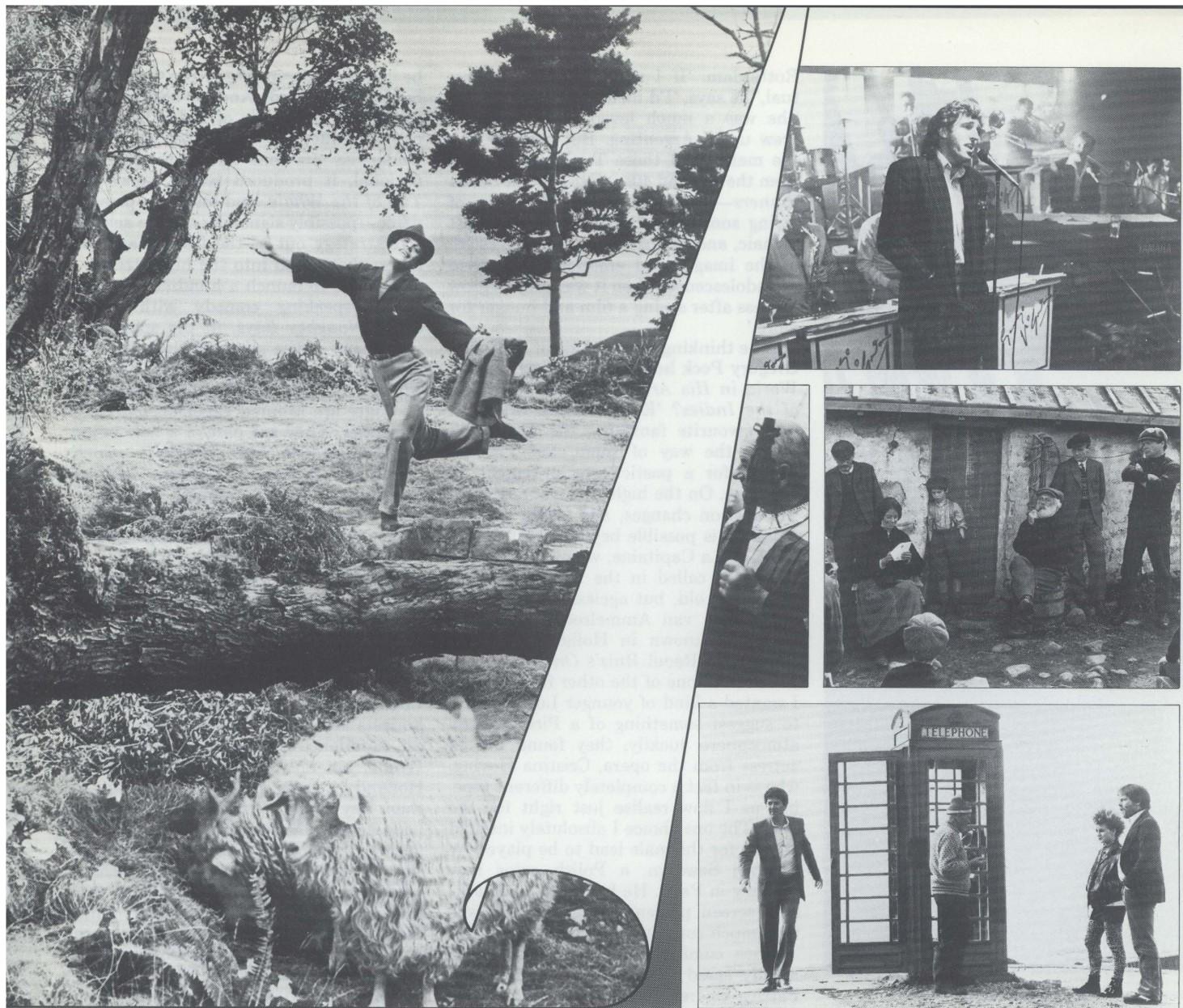
be in English, translated from the French by Don Ranvaud. And to add another storey to this Tower of Babel the company is called La Production du Tigre. Under its previous name, Film International, it produced Raoul Ruiz's *On Top of the Whale*, and under its present name—possibly signalling a more aggressive strategy out of the festival and art house ghetto and into the high streets—it is about to launch a hundred per cent English-speaking comedy with music called *Naughty Boys*, in the spirit and with many of the songs of Noël Coward, written and directed by Eric de Kuyper. The moving spirits behind La Production du Tigre are Monica Tegelaar and Kees Kasander. They are part of a new breed of independent film producer which seems to thrive in Europe, putting together the most unlikely 'packages' with immense resourcefulness, very little money, but occasionally with a gambler's instinct for what pays off.

The most successful of the 'naughty boys' in the profession are no doubt Paolo Branco and Pierre Cottrell. Like them, Monica Tegelaar is firmly convinced that the way ahead lies in making 'studio system' films, with production values and box-office appeal, but on low budgets and tight schedules. Her happiest experience has been *On Top of the Whale*, not only because it represented Holland at more international festivals than any other Dutch film ever, but because 'the shooting was so economical, fast and relaxed.' Monica Tegelaar is Argentinian by birth and went to school in Geneva. For ten years she worked with the Rotterdam film festival and Film International before founding her own production company. Apart from La Production du Tigre, she also has a stake in two other companies, Springtime Films and a distribution company, Classic Films. Through the latter, she is reissuing Godard's films in the Benelux countries, and Springtime Films are due to produce a video film with Godard as well as a documentary of Bob Wilson working on his massive performance piece *Civil War*.

Why is she involved in so many different companies? 'It makes raising money just a little easier, now that government subsidies for independent filmmakers are drying up, and not only in Holland. I can put money into production as an advance on distribution and thereby attract other co-producers. We can still make films quite cheaply in Holland, because many of our young film school graduates are keen to work in feature films and not just for television.' It also helps those who do not want to go into the industry to keep their artists' bursary—a part of the Dutch government's cultural policy which the recession has not altogether eroded.

High Seas, with its three-week shooting schedule, enthusiastic young crew and relatively expensive location shooting (the schooner alone cost £1,500 a day to hire), is the Tiger's biggest leap so far. It should certainly be big enough to make it across the Channel and, who knows, across the Atlantic, too.

THOMAS ELSAESSER



Land Beyond Brigadoon

During a Guardian Lecture at the Glasgow Film Theatre in November 1981 David Puttnam offered the unsolicited opinion that the most interesting work in British cinema over the next few years might well come from Scotland—adding hastily that this wasn't intended simply as a self-serving reference to his own collaboration with Bill Forsyth, then under way, on *Local Hero*. The Scots have a powerful desire to believe in the latent supremacy of native talent, no matter what (as in the case of football) the evidence; but it's also a prime Scottish characteristic to be profoundly suspicious of compliments from the English. Since the audience included most of

the Scottish film-makers embarking on Channel 4 projects, the response to Puttnam's remark was rather schizoid—a number of people struggled to appear

John Brown

modest, cynical and flattered simultaneously.

Two years later, this seems an appropriate moment at which to take critical stock and to ask a few questions about the general direction of the new Scottish cinema, by which I principally mean the

feature films produced since 1981: Forsyth's *Local Hero*, Bill Bryden's *Ill Fares the Land*, Barney Platts-Mills' *Hero*, Murray Grigor's *Scotch Myths—the Movie*, Michael Radford's *Another Time, Another Place* and Charles Gormley's *Living Apart Together*. In this particular context I don't propose to take much notice of the fact that all of them except *Local Hero* were substantially funded by Channel 4 and thus ultimately intended for television screening, nor of the fact that two of them (*Another Time*, *Another Place* and *Hero*) were directed and part-written by honorary Scots, i.e. Englishmen who have 'done their time' north of the border. Nor, finally, should

it be thought that these six movies constitute all there is of the new Scottish cinema: in the same period there have been such remarkable short films as Leslie Keen's *Taking a Line for a Walk* and Ian Knox's *The Privilege*, as well as the documentary series by Michael Alexander and Douglas Eadie, *How to Be Celtic*, whose account of Scotland today (in *All Quiet on the Northern Front?*) is perhaps the most accurate so far put on film.

As a preface to this stocktaking, however, some scene-setting is necessary, precisely in order to deal later with what is specifically and significantly Scottish about these films. The key point with which we have to begin is that cinema audiences in Scotland are not at all accustomed to seeing Scottish movies. The result (as in Wales and Ireland, those other Celtic peripheries of these off-shore European islands) is that a complex set of presumptions, suspicions and indeed fears comes into play as soon as the audience is presented with itself on the screen. Bill Forsyth alludes to one element of this in the summer 1983 interview in *SIGHT AND SOUND* when he talks about the way in which Scottish films have to be culturally validated elsewhere before gaining acceptability at home: 'When *Gregory's Girl* opened in Glasgow initially it played three weeks, then after it had been in London and all that, it came back and played seventy-five weeks.' He may be right in believing that *Local Hero*, by playing to large and appreciative Scottish audiences from the outset, has helped to break down that barrier; but the problems are thornier than a worried scepticism about the quality of home-made movies. At root, they connect with the needle-sharp Scots sense of national identity and image, and with the way these have been traditionally mediated—for Scots themselves as well as for the wider world—by cinema.

Discussion of this topic, wherever it starts from, soon bears down on three emblematic films: Vincente Minnelli's *Brigadoon* and Alexander MacKendrick's two Ealing comedies, *Whisky Galore* (retitled in America, not unsympathetically, *Tight Little Island*) and *The Maggie*. Of course there are other films which can be cited, as various as *Bonnie Prince Charlie*, *Rob Roy the Highland Rogue*, *Laxdale Hall*, *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, *I Know Where I'm Going*, *The Little Minister*, *Kidnapped* and—easily the most offensive of them all, though rarely mentioned—*Geordie*; but like Ford's *How Green Was My Valley* and *The Quiet Man* in the eyes of the Welsh and the Irish respectively, the Minnelli film and the two MacKendricks are the ones most commonly accused. What they are held to be guilty of is that they are attempts, made from outside these countries and cultures, to embody some kind of definitive essence of them. They are not unsympathetic attempts, but the way they represent the Scots, the Welsh and the Irish (and their success in being well received internationally) has long been the subject of bitter attack within these

countries. The Scottish attack on *Brigadoon*, *Whisky Galore* and *The Maggie*—or, more exactly, on the cultural syndrome to which they have so massively contributed—operates at two levels.

First, there is a profound distaste for what might be called the infrastructure of these films: for the way the Scots are insistently portrayed as quaint and old-fashioned, comically innocent or comically cunning, and for the way the country is characterised as no more than a natural paradise of romanticised mountain, loch and glen. This is made worse by the consistent thematic use of 'Scotland' as being superior to the real modern world, sophisticated and industrialised, by which the natural paradise is blessedly untouched—how fortunate these peasants are, to be close to the land and the sea and the eternal verities, to be free of materialism, class conflict and other neuroses. The second level of the attack follows on from this and focuses on the base or substructure, as it were, for it takes the form of a political revulsion against the cultural/industrial institutions themselves (Hollywood, i.e. the commercial cinema) which by their very mode of operation create such images of Scotland and then impose them on the international consciousness to the exclusion of other, more authentic images. The charge is therefore essentially one of wilful misrepresentation.

It would be wrong to assume from the terms I've used here that these issues are perceived and discussed only by the intelligentsia. There is, in fact, a widespread realisation in Scotland of the way in which the image of a picturesque and backward country, a Third World of the North, is sustained by memories of *Whisky Galore*, *The Maggie* and *Brigadoon*, and a correspondingly widespread resentment of that image. But the lines of dispute (and the matter of developing correctives to be applied) are more complex in some ways, and I want to conclude this bit of scene-setting by pointing to some further issues which seem to me to preclude the rejection of 'Scotland' on the screen simply as a hopeless case of cultural imperialism.

No part of Scotland, for instance, is more acutely aware of itself and its image than the Outer Hebrides or Western Isles; this area knows all about the social and economic consequences of being the outpost of an outpost, and unlike most other parts of the north (inaccurately but usually referred to as the Highlands) has a Scottish Nationalist Member of Parliament.* This is where *Whisky Galore* is set; and by a very large margin the most popular film ever screened in the islands, either by the former Highlands and Islands Film Guild or more recently by Cinema Sgire (both mobile cinema units), is *Whisky Galore*. This is in fact only one example of a much wider phenomenon, which includes the cult of Robert Burns, the large television audiences for such home-knitted music series as *Song for Scotland* and the indescribable *Thingumyjig* and the enormous readership of

*Since 1970—previously it was a Labour seat, again unlike most of the Highlands.

publications such as the *Weekly News*, the *People's Journal* and the *Sunday Post*. Perhaps I should explain that these are a kind of tabloid magazine, consisting of folksy news and features totally within the *Whisky Galore* syndrome and selling millions of copies every week to a population of less than six million. They are all published, incidentally, by one company, and the astonishing story of that unique institution is told in Paul Harris' collection of essays, *The D. C. Thomson Bumper Fun Book*, whose ironic title takes its cue from Tom Nairn's remark that Scotland would not be free until the last minister was strangled with the last copy of the *Sunday Post*.

What has to be acknowledged is that possibly the majority of Scots are eager consumers—behind their own front doors, you might say—of the very artefacts whose influence outside Scotland they would claim to deplore. This is usually seen (and correctly, to some extent) as the ultimate evidence of cultural colonisation resulting from cultural imperialism: the oppressed accept, internalise and finally delight in the image of themselves manufactured by the oppressors. But such an explanation glosses over what may be an important point. I happen to dislike pipe bands and the panoply of tartan militarism which goes with them; yet when Dustin Hoffman plays a record of pipe music to accompany the climactic battle in *Straw Dogs* (apparently Peckinpah considered setting the film in Scotland instead of the English west country) my response as a Scot is complicated. At one level it intensifies, with alarming immediacy, the atmosphere of combat—this is certainly great music to fight to. At another level, its cultural distance from the Hoffman character (an American academic: how curiously fond the New World is of Scatlan' and its traditions) and the fact that it is technologically reproduced underline the willed nature of Hoffman's stance. The conflict between the two responses—neither endorsed, neither denied—perfectly embodies the larger, master tension within the film. This may be a small point, but I hope it serves to illustrate a more general argument—namely that it may be unwise to reject automatically the various elements in the *Whisky Galore* syndrome. Perhaps such elements are not hopelessly and irretrievably reactionary in certain contexts; perhaps their very pervasiveness in Scottish popular culture and their familiarity abroad means that they can be used, be turned against themselves. Something of this sort, I think, happens in *Local Hero* and *Ill Fares the Land*; but leaving this point for later, I want now to turn briefly to the notion of misrepresentation.

There is a central problem here in that *Whisky Galore*, *The Maggie* and *Brigadoon* are far from being simple and unambivalent works. The Minnelli film plays overtly with conceptions of illusion and reality in a highly stylised and artificial way; at the very least, it's aware of its own kitschiness in visual and thematic terms. In a different mode, *The Maggie* shares with some of MacKendrick's other

work (*A High Wind in Jamaica* and *The Man in the White Suit*) a strong tendency towards allegory—it's not accidental that the haplessly blundering American businessman played by Paul Douglas is called Calvin Marshall, combining Protestantism and American post-war aid in a part of Scotland which is largely Catholic and notoriously unaided. It seems to me that the representation of Scotland in these films is often misread simplistically, and that distantiating ironies are being missed when the charge of misrepresentation is raised.

More generally, I think we also have to ask whether 'misrepresentation' is in any case a workable critical term. To widen the context, let me cite some fairly random examples: Mexicans watching *The Wild Bunch*, Appalachian mountain people watching *Coal Miner's Daughter*, women watching *Tootsie*, children watching *Lord of the Flies*. Who is to say who is being misrepresented, and on behalf of whom? Can there ever be such a thing as 'non-misrepresentation'? Indeed, the argument for misrepresentation seems to rest on two propositions—first, that films can hold an accurate mirror up to life if we only so desire, and second, that life is knowable and describable independently of any process of representation. In theoretical terms this marks a reversion to primitive neo-realism, and as such seems scarcely tenable; and as a way of approaching the new Scottish cinema it's a particularly useless red herring.

It is, however, significant that no less than five of the six films are set in the Highlands or relate iconographically to central elements in the *Whisky Galore* syndrome. While *Scotch Myths* mounts a full-blooded attack on tartanry, tourism, Brigadoonery and 'Scotchness' in general, and *Hero* re-tells a Celtic legend in flat, quasi-postmodernist terms, *Local Hero*, *Ill Fares the Land* and *Another Time, Another Place* all focus squarely on what might be called the basic Highland myth in films about Scotland—namely, the image of the isolated Highland/rural community facing disruption from the outside world.

It would be perverse not to begin with *Local Hero*, since it deliberately ventures nearest the *Whisky Galore* (or, to be strictly accurate, *The Maggie*) syndrome. Its overall narrative design is frankly Ealingesque; an American oil company is anxious to purchase a village and bay on the north-west coast as a site for an oil terminal, a situation which invokes the now familiar master opposition between the modern industrialised world and the timeless rural world. And if one speed-reads the film, there are enough bits and pieces of plot and character to encourage the view that for all Bill Forsyth's wit and skill, the Anglo-American movie machine has done it to us again: the peasant-villagers may be able to outwit the Yanks but it still ain't Scotland's oil.

But only a Procrustean approach, and a determined one at that, will support this reductionist view. For a start, *Local Hero* has a narrative which appears to be quite linear and almost casual in its



Efforts to communicate with the outside world. Above: Paul Douglas in *The Maggie*. Below: Peter Riegert in *Local Hero*.



construction but which carries, on closer examination, a dense pattern of themes and variants, full of intricate correspondences and rhymes. As an admittedly minor example of this expressive formalism, there is the way in which movement in and out of the village is organised. The static tableaux of the villagers always sitting round talking (is a Maserati inferior to a Rolls-Royce for transporting sheep?) are systematically disrupted by the land, sea and air arrivals of Mac and Danny, Victor the Russian trawler skipper and Happer the oil magnate respectively, while the magical emergences of Marina on the beach and the near-subliminal eruptions of the village's Hell's Angel, always roaring up and down the main street and apparently going nowhere, are further variants on this motif. Another (and more important) pattern revolves around the sea/sky opposition, and the complex associations

which the film establishes between the two terms of the opposition and the various characters and incidents: the two women named after harbour and star and the pairing of Danny and Mac with them, the chain linking together the aurora borealis, the meteor shower, the jet fighters screaming overhead, Happer's obsession with astronomy and his arrival by helicopter (its light is described in the screenplay as an 'eccentric star') and Mac's abrupt final departure by the same vehicle. This culminates in the bleak moment when Mac returns home, looks at the seashells he has brought with him and then goes out on to his balcony to gaze at the night skyline of Houston through the pollution haze.

In their analyses of fiction, the Russian formalists made a central distinction between *fabula* and *sjuzet*—roughly, between 'paraphrasable story' and 'specificity of the text'. The distinction is

crucial to *Local Hero* because the all-too-ready familiarity of the *fabula* can overpower the subtlety of the *sjuzet* and the distance which Forsyth quietly puts between the two. Once the film's narrative mode is recognised and the spectator has tuned into its playful, allusive style, its relationship to *Whisky Galore* and the others falls into place. Essentially what *Local Hero* does is to use them as a common cinematic (and indeed extracinematic) myth which provides a grain against which to work—significantly, in the interview already quoted, Forsyth speaks of knowing these films without specifically having to see them. In fact he uses them in just this way, as a stock of themes, characters and situations, already familiar and inflected, to which *Local Hero* can refer out of the corner of its mouth, as it were. It is, for example, the more than slightly mad scientist played by Rikki Fulton—conventionally the spokesman of technological progress and rationalism—who twitchingly welcomes Mac to 'our little world' and ecstatically mutters 'Dreamland!' as he plays with the models demonstrating the plans for destroying the village. Moreover, the villagers themselves cannot wait to surrender up their way of life for the compensation they will receive (witness the wonderful moment at the ceilidh when two old men perform a sedate but involuntary jig at the thought of the millions coming to them) and are quite prepared to turn on Ben the beachcomber when he refuses to sell the beach. There is scarcely a joke in the film—from the presence of the black Reverend MacPherson to the village punkette's adoration of the uptight, tweed-suited Danny—which doesn't contribute to the unsystematic subversion of the *Whisky Galore* syndrome.

But these are means to an end in *Local Hero*, not ends in themselves, for while the design is Ealingesque, the final result more closely resembles Capra, especially the Capra of, say, *It's a Wonderful Life*. The core of the film is a formal pattern, a symmetrical grouping of figures: Happer the *deus/diabolus ex machina* (a madman, says Forsyth, each of whose scenes displays a different facet of lunacy) confronted by three young men, Mac, Danny and Urquhart, each of whom connects with one aspect of Happer (practical oilman, mystic dreamer, benign capitalist) while these four are flanked by two women, Stella and Marina, and two happy misfits, the beachcomber and the sailor. Through the dance of their alliances and conflicts comes the bass-note of *Local Hero* (and of Forsyth's other work), the assertion that each of us is alone because we cannot help seeing the world as an extension of our individual images of ourselves—with the result (astringently observed at a distance which never quite becomes overtly critical) that any moment of common cause is either comic accident or cosmic coincidence. Yet in all the permutations the socio-economic realities are not dodged. Characteristically in terms of the film's ironies, it's Urquhart, the chief negotiator, who consistently reminds us of the

consequences: 'stinking rich and nowhere to live.' He gets on, however, with the job of securing the best deal he can; as the cooking of the rabbit and the odd, throwaway line about the oranges Ben finds ('Oh God,' says Urquhart, 'they're South African,' and gloomily carries on eating) both illustrate, the pragmatist is given his due, neither endorsed nor undercut by the film.

While *Local Hero* works obliquely to score off the traditional Highland movie myth of wily, twilit Celts and crass entrepreneurial outsiders, *Ill Fares the Land* confronts the myth head on. The material on which Bill Bryden has based his film directing debut (he has, of course, a major reputation as writer and director in the theatre and wrote the original version of the screenplay of Walter Hill's *The Long Riders*) is a 'true story': the transfer to the mainland of the small community living on the St Kilda group of islands some fifty miles west of the Outer Hebrides, in the wildness of the Atlantic. The evacuation took place in 1930 and is still the subject of some controversy; as Tom Steel's book, *The*

key sequences (the burial of Willie MacDonald's father, the wedding of Rachel MacDonald and Neil Ferguson) as the familiar Fordian rites of passage. This element is hauntingly present, with the islanders back-lit against sea and sky and with Willie (David Hayman) leaning against a wall exactly as Wayne did in *Stagecoach*; but Bryden is doing something more complex and significant than merely imitating the director whom he quoted ('Print the legend!') in the programme notes for his play *Benny Lynch*, about the rise and tragic fall of the Scots world champion boxer of the 1920s.

In a curious way the strategy for representing the islanders of St Kilda reverses that of *The Long Riders*. In that film, Bryden's script about the James brothers and the other family groups making up their gang carried clear echoes of the Highland clan structure, while the aftermath of the American Civil War provided an historical context parallel to that of the Highlands after the abortive Jacobite rebellion of 1745 and the brutal reassertion of English domination over Scotland. In *Ill Fares*

Ill Fares the Land: a letter from America.



Life and Death of St Kilda, recounts, the islanders were experiencing increasing difficulties (near total isolation in terms of communications and supplies, coupled with the ravages of illness brought about by the inception of tourist trips), but the community's way of life was centuries old and the islanders were themselves divided on the issue of evacuation. When the transfer eventually took place, there was more than a hint of quiet official compulsion about it.

Such material might seem the very stuff of dramatised documentary, in the sense of 'history' reconstructed within a clear (i.e. transparent) social realist aesthetic; but even more than Forsyth in *Local Hero*, Bryden puts a distance between *fabula* and *sjuzet*—in this case by conceiving the narrative in terms of John Ford's cinematic universe. I don't mean simply that Bryden has applied Ford's visual style to the story and staged

the Land Bryden turns this strategy on its head, by using the American myth of the Desert and the Garden to explore what happened to St Kilda and to drive home a contemporary meaning.

This rephrasing of one myth in terms of another gives the film a quite extraordinary resonance, sustaining a crucial (and profoundly Fordian) perspective—in Andrew Sarris' words, 'A double vision of an event in all its vital immediacy and yet also in its ultimate memory image on the horizon of history.' Bryden presents a Garden which is maintained in constant defiance of the oceanic Desert, and yet is economically and spiritually dependent upon it; we glimpse the receding dream ('...boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past') of social harmony and self-sufficiency at the same time that we watch the community crumble under pressure from within and without; and we understand the inevitability

of this expulsion from Eden while we feel the full tragedy of the islanders' incomprehension of their collective fate. Indeed, the last few minutes of the film—the movement from house to house as the Bibles are read for the final time, the slow procession to the pier, the discreet jump-cut which takes the islanders from the last look at their homes to the prospect of the curious crowds on the mainland and the relentless tracking shot of their bewilderment as they are herded into the waiting cars—are almost unbearably painful.

But *Ill Fares the Land* does not simply recover history—its *sujet* accommodates a number of elements, none especially stressed in themselves, which combine to strike a harshly contemporary note. The role of religion is treated both at the level of the islanders' faith (a fair amount of the dialogue consists of Biblical quotation and allusion) and at the level of institutionalised authority: the formal permission of the visiting minister from the mainland to allow dancing at the wedding, or the way that the nurse first enlists the reluctant support of the island's schoolteacher/minister in the case for evacuation. More overtly political is the sequence where the island is visited by the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, delicately played by Robert Stephens; although he feels the magnificence of the island and its way of life, he endorses the view of the nurse, whom a carefully placed line of dialogue establishes as a firm Conservative voter, about evacuation. (The sequence matches, incidentally, the role and visit of Happer in *Local Hero*, just as there is an eerily coincidental use of oranges as symbols in both films.) And finally, there is photography: the Under-Secretary refers to it as his hobby ('little pieces of time', he says, in a quotation so abstruse that I'm not sure Bryden is using it consciously) and is prompted by his assistant's behaviour to decide that the evacuation must not be observed by newspaper reporters; earlier, the islanders have been photographed, against their will, by the tourists, just as later their bewilderment on arrival on the mainland will be compounded by the flash-bulbs of the press photographers and the clicking cameras of the onlookers; and in a centrally self-reflexive scene, the islanders are transfixed by a film-show presented by Willie MacDonald—first Charlie Chaplin and then (a stunning use of archive footage) themselves, 'the inhabitants', the title tells them, 'of Britain's loneliest isle'. The circle of mediation is complete.

A full account of *Ill Fares the Land* would have to deal with other elements of which I've said little (with the role of Willie MacDonald, for example, unable to live on the island but equally unable to stay away, and in himself a recurrent figure in Bryden's work) and would have also to acknowledge some local failures and misjudgments. Nevertheless, the film seems to me the finest directorial debut in British cinema for many years, and its bitterly elegiac meaning is unmistakable. *Ill Fares the Land* is a representation of a community struggling to hold on to a

dream of a self-sufficient past while it contends unsuccessfully with the realities of the present, a community still under the sway of the church and constructed by the medium of film as a quaint and primitive place for the tourists to romanticise, and a community whose demise is presided over by a *realpolitik* alliance between a complaisant Socialist male and an authoritarian Conservative woman. Bryden's St Kilda 1930 is Scotland 1983.

Because both Forsyth's and Bryden's movies have been too superficially, almost too quickly appreciated, it seems more important at this stage of the new Scottish cinema's development to emphasise the substantial achievements of *Local Hero* and *Ill Fares the Land* than to give equal space to the shortcomings of *Hero*, *Scotch Myths* and *Another Time, Another Place*, the other three films dealing with related themes and ideas. All three are of considerable interest, in their failures as much as in their successes; but measured against their makers' evident ambitions they are all in different ways seriously flawed.

The gap between intention and execution is most marked in Barney Platts-Mills' *Hero*, which Platts-Mills himself seems inclined (witness the *Monthly Film Bulletin* interview, December 1982) to dismiss virtually as a horrendous mistake. He began to develop the screenplay in 1979, basing it on some of the Gaelic folk-tales collected by J. F. Campbell in the 1860s; the idea was to re-tell the story of the legendary hero Finn Mac-Cumhaill in a style which would be, if not contemporary, at least free of the usual aestheticising and 'historicising' of the distant past. Somewhere along the line, the plan to use non-actors (chiefly young people from Drumchapel, a vast bleak housing estate known as Glasgow's answer to the Gulag Archipelago) became aggrandised into a project which entailed the young people building a replica village of the period, making the costumes and props and learning Gaelic, the

language in which most of the dialogue is spoken, pidgin-style.

From a social point of view, Platts-Mills says, the project was a disaster, and not a few critics have said the same of the film. Yet *Hero* has its admirers, Bill Forsyth among them; the argument seems to be that, given its director's own disillusionment, the film should be read as a bitter parody of its original conception, deconstructing itself into meta-comedy. A patient second viewing makes some sense of this perspective—the ramshackle, shivering cast, pretending to be mythic heroes in some scruffy street theatre improvisation, are certainly as far from *Brigadoon* as it's possible to get, and the plot's aimless wandering and casual, sporadic bursts of violence have a certain contemporary ring to them: another wet weekend in Drumchapel. So the film's iconoclastic intentions can be glimpsed, theoretically, amidst its decidedly non-picturesque but rather memorable landscapes; but even if such a reading can be sustained, it's available only to a very small audience of insiders—and that fatally limits *Hero*, as far as a wider public is concerned, at best to the level of a curiosity.

Something of the same basic problem affects *Scotch Myths*, a much more coherent and cerebral film which, far more savagely than *Hero*, sets about de-mythologising 'Scotland' and disrupting conventional notions of narrative cinema. As the full title of Murray Grigor's film indicates (*Scotch Myths—the Movie*, also known at one stage of production as *Brecksadoon*, meaning 'trousers down' and/or 'breaks down')—Grigor has a passion for puns both verbal and visual) its antecedents lie outside cinema. It originated in an exhibition assembled by Grigor and his wife Barbara, which gathered together a mind-bending collection of 'Scotch' icons and artefacts: everything from Victorian paintings to contemporary postcards, D. C. Thomson comic strips such as 'Oor Wullie' and 'The Broons' to tourist souvenirs, bottles of

Simon Perry (left), producer of *Another Time, Another Place*, appears in *Hero*.



whisky to biscuit tins, all of them swathed in the inevitable tartan. The tone was set by an old joke about that most mythic of Scottish characteristics: a coin apparently lying on (but in fact glued to) the floor at the entrance. In other words, the exhibition was also a kind of performance art, with visitors acting as the (initially) unknowing performers.

Scotch Myths—the Movie begins with a group of lost tourists being guided to Castle Dundreich, the ultimate tourist trap, where they are vigorously fleeced before the cabaret starts. This consists of various revue sketches featuring figures such as Sir Walter Scott, James Boswell, Lord Byron and Felix Mendelssohn, all of whom (but especially Scott, venomously impersonated by John Bett) are shown busily ‘inventing’ Scotland for their own purposes. Interspersed rather weakly with these are some surreal interludes, including scenes where a Hollywood director called ‘Sam Fuller’ and played, quite convincingly, by Sam Fuller tramps the surrounding countryside in search of a film. The overall result is ferociously witty and erudite, but somehow how all the jokes are delivered through clenched teeth. Bits and pieces work well in themselves—for instance, a hilarious scene in which Bett/Scott and Chic Murray, looking like a baffled walrus, concoct a new and totally spurious tartan for the visiting George IV, which is then followed by a memorable animation sequence (by Donald Holwill) featuring a chameleon vainly struggling to keep up with an endless succession of tartan backdrops. But the point is hammered home again and again, the thesis being that ‘Scotchery’ is an ideological prison which others have constructed for the Scots; and the relentless of the message takes *Scotch Myths* too close to the kind of educational film which sugars the hard facts with a few self-conscious jokes and songs.

Scotch Myths’ transmission on Channel 4 (appropriately on Old Year’s

Night—New Year’s Eve to non-Scots) provoked a brief flurry of debate in the Scottish press, and the arguments surfaced again at the Edinburgh Film Festival later in the year. The case made against the film was that it had expended too much energy on an easy target, and that there were more pernicious modern myths about Scotland to be exposed and destroyed. I’m not so sure; the kind of television programmes with which *Scotch Myths* was competing on 31 December are evidence that the tartan monster lives on. But it’s the film’s idea of its audience which seems to me, as with *Hero*, the central problem. Its conception and form as a thesis offer no concession either to those who already know and agree with what the film is saying and want to move on, or to those who have never thought (and don’t much care) about the thesis in the first place. Moreover, there is a certain ambivalence in *Scotch Myths*, for the piling up of Scotch nonsenses is eventually beguiling, and the possibility that the film is secretly in love with the objects of its hatred narrows its effect still further: perhaps all it does is preach an ambiguous message to the already ambiguously converted.

If *Hero* and *Scotch Myths* operate within a modernist, anti-illusionist aesthetic, Michael Radford’s *Another Time, Another Place* returns us squarely to the conventions of realism. Set in 1944, it deals with the developing relationship between a farmer’s wife and three Italian prisoners-of-war billeted on the farm, and with the tragic affair she has with one of them. Radford also returns us from myth to actuality in terms of setting—the bleak fields of the north-east coast near Inverness.

In some important ways, *Another Time, Another Place* is more accessible than *Hero* or *Scotch Myths*. It’s conventionally enjoyable and is very well made—the period reconstruction is immaculate without ever being self-conscious, the photography and the acting (especially Phyllis Logan, whose

performance as Janey, the central character, is near-perfect in its physical and emotional detail) are excellent, the direction has a clarity which almost removes the need for the spare, clipped dialogue, and the film as a whole is a model of what can be achieved on a low budget. But at a different level, *Another Time, Another Place* is the greatest disappointment of these films, because it has the potential to dig deep into the Highland myth and doesn’t do so.

Like Forsyth and Bryden, Radford and his co-scenarist Jessie Kesson are concerned with the disruption of the community by outside forces, although the agents in this case are reluctant and involuntary ones: a shambling professorial type, a conventionally handsome ‘Latin lover’ and an excitable, faintly unpleasant opportunist who, with a kind of predictable twist, becomes Janey’s lover. In terms of thematic oppositions, the Italians stand for a rich collection of ‘othernesses’, such as Mediterraneanism against Northernism, Catholicism against Presbyterianism, emotionalism against repressiveness, volubility against taciturnity and so on. All these oppositions are established in the film, as when Luigi, Janey’s lover, has a heartfelt outburst against the foul Scottish weather, or when Janey shows her friends a carving Luigi has done, explaining it’s the Madonna, and gets the flat response, ‘Looks just like the Virgin Mary to me.’ But Radford does no more than state the oppositions, just as he constructs the farming community itself almost entirely at the level of work in the fields.

The result is that the nature of the disruption is severely restricted to the level of community *mores*, leaving unexplored the interesting subsidiary character of Meg, who refuses to have anything to do with the Italians because her husband has been killed at Monte Cassino (and yet implicitly offers comfort to Janey in the final scene). Thus the affair between Janey and Luigi, however well realised from moment to moment, remains a stereotypical tale of the repressed, intelligently yearning woman who finds a brief flowering in the passionate and sexually capable hands of a rogue who’s carefully portrayed as the opposite of her dour and notably unpassionate husband. All the resonances—social, religious, historical—which could have been thematically gathered around the Janey/Luigi relationship and used to explode *Another Time, Another Place* out of its uncomfortable resemblance to standard romantic fiction and into an anatomy of the way Scottish society constructs femininity and masculinity—all the resonances are there, but undeveloped. In *Hero* and *Scotch Myths* the execution is never really adequate to the conception; in *Another Time, Another Place* the execution is admirable but the conception remains distressingly thin.

Either literally or figuratively, the five movies discussed so far focus on the Highlands, the geographical source (or rather, taking the point of *Scotch Myths*, the target) of so many elements that go

Scotch Myths: John Bett (Scott) and Chic Murray concoct a tartan for George IV.



to make up the traditional image of Scotland. But there is, of course, another dominant myth which has its locus in urban Scotland and more precisely in Glasgow, whose very name is mythopoeic, conjuring up associations of virulent urban decay and poverty, confrontations between Catholic and Protestant and the reputation of being the cradle of the wildest football supporters on earth. It's an image which has been created and sustained by television and the press rather than by cinema (although in recent years Bertrand Tavernier's *Deathwatch* and John MacKenzie's *A Sense of Freedom* have made complex and fascinating use of it) and its relationship to reality, if such a thing exists, is just as complicated and contradictory as in the case of the Highland myth. Apart from the possible reading of *Hero*, mentioned earlier, the last of these six films, Charles Gormley's *Living Apart Together*, is the only one to position itself in relation to the urban myth. The fact that it's possibly the least known of these six films outside Scotland is due to its chequered post-production history. Commissioned by Channel 4, it was intended to have a cinema release prior to its television screening, but product shortage at Channel 4 meant that it was transmitted almost as soon as it was finished, against the producers' and director's protests.

Gormley's film is a (mostly) light-hearted comedy with music, its (fairly) loose narrative centred on the experiences of Glasgow-based rock singer Ritchie Hannah (a very promising acting debut by singer/composer B. A. Robertson) as he chases round town after his errant wife Evie, with the basic irony being that she has to wait for his return from touring before she can leave him. The chasing is done in swimming-pools and music shops but mostly—this being Glasgow—in pubs, and Ritchie's efforts are variously aided and abetted by his manager's girl Friday, his amused and enigmatic father-in-law and his best friend (an excellent performance by David Anderson) who's always had a notion to play Iago. Within its own terms, *Living Apart Together* is attractively unpretentious, skipping neatly from set-piece to set-piece, occasionally missing a step but then cheerfully regaining its footing; like many other films in its genre, it has a sharp, distinctive flavour that defies quick critical characterisation—it's difficult to convey to those who haven't seen it the neat b-movie economy with which Gormley handles such scenes as the music shop duet of Ritchie and his friend Steve, in which the performance of the song becomes an unspoken discussion between the two men about the watching girl and indicates a whole history of rivalry—or the scene in which Ritchie encounters a pair of amused, laconic thugs intending to sort him out, and stages an abortive car crash to escape. What's wrong with the film is more easily accounted for; Evie's situation is established only to the degree the plot requires, the subtext of some relationships is too sub for the film's good; and the film shifts gear into seriousness too

overtly and too abruptly towards the end—Gormley's own comment was that it needed one less song at the start and one less at the finish.

But without making inflated claims for Gormley's film, its significance emerges only when it is seen in relation to the urban myth of Glasgow as 'no mean city' and by extension to the other films discussed here. It acknowledges some of the elements in the myth (the sudden appearance of the thugs who climb into Ritchie's car and, knowing their Hollywood movies as well as any Glaswegian, tell him to shut up and drive) but it counters them with a succession of glittering exteriors and glowing interiors, an insistence on the huge musical subculture for which the city ought to be famous and isn't, an abundance of humour and deft one-liners and a tight focus on the very ordinary and non-exclusively Scottish problems of being married and getting a little too old to see it simply as socially sanctioned sex. In a revealing way, *Living Apart Together* does the same thing as *Another Time, Another Place*, but with the opposite result. Like Radford, Gormley restricts himself to telling a small-scale, intimate story in a consciously limited way; but *Living Apart Together* has the sheer weight and pervasiveness of the urban myth which it opposes to depend on for creating the resonances. The *fabula* and *sjuzet* of Radford's movie are barely distinguishable from one another; Gormley's *fabula* scarcely exists.

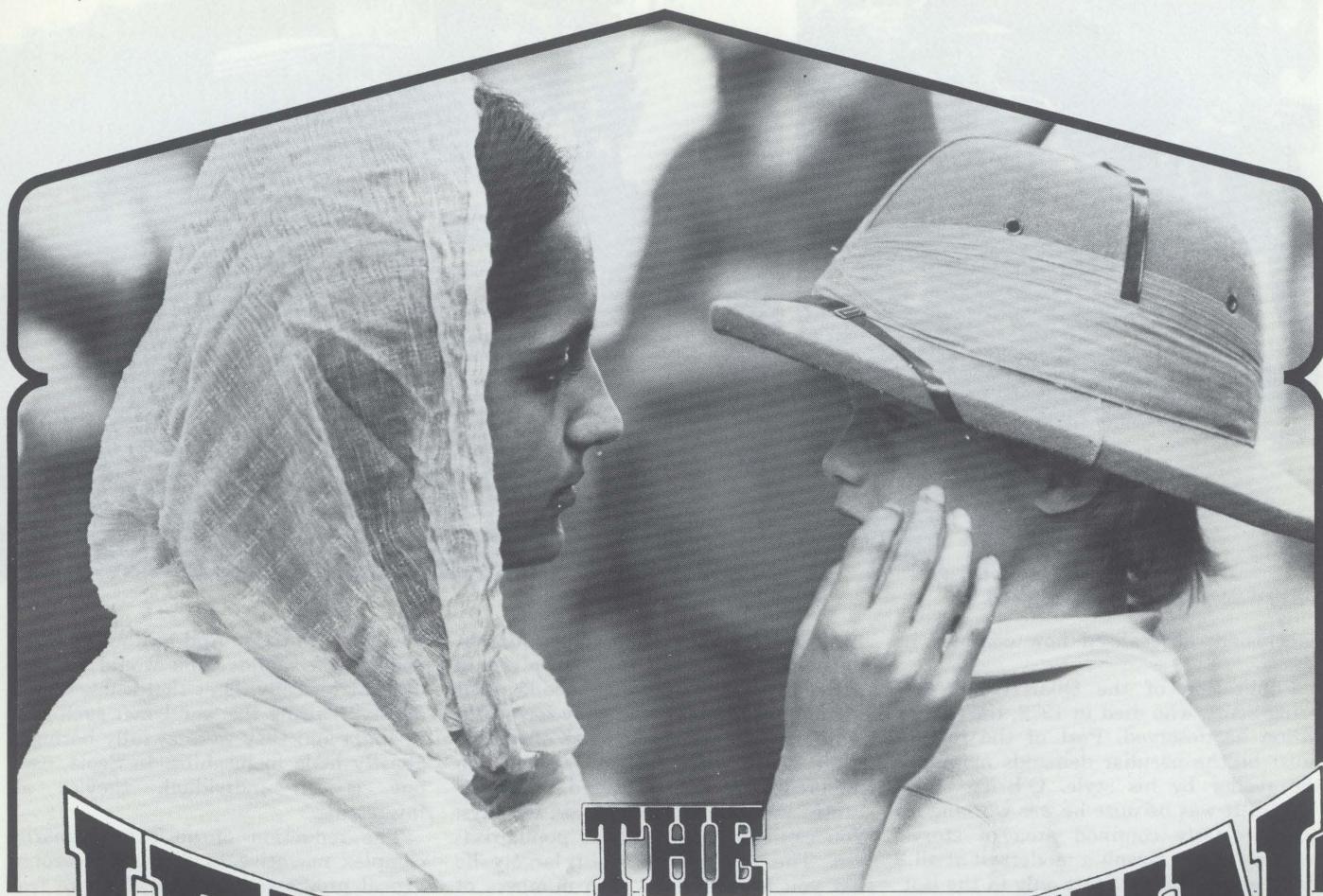
Towards the end of *Local Hero*, Forsyth's madman arrives in the Highlands and declares, 'You've got a good sky here. The air is clear. I could get to like this place.' The words are addressed to the Scot Danny, whom Happer has mistaken in the Celtic twilight for Mac, whom Happer believes, equally mistakenly, is of Scottish descent; thus Happer gets it right while also getting it all wrong. But the comic paradox leaves standing, untouched at the centre, the actual response to landscape, and what is striking about the five movies relating to the Highland myth is their complex attitude to the signification of the land. While

Bryden's Under-Secretary is given not only a moment but also words ('But it is magnificent!') precisely parallel to Happer's, *Scotch Myths* attacks the cosy spuriousness of the images constructed for the tourists and fleetingly reveals the wildness of Staffa and Fingal's Cave; and *Hero* and *Another Time, Another Place* foreground the bleakness and harshness of the Highlands in contrast to the figures who move through them. The dominant Scottish movie myths relate specifically to landscape and geography, the country versus the city, and while Bryden is the only one to employ them consciously the metaphors of Garden and Desert animate all five films, as they do Scottish culture generally. Hence the films' refusal, despite the strictures of the cultural anti-imperialist analysis, to dismiss the Highland myth as nothing more than a reactionary and pernicious distortion of the Scottish psyche.

This attitude to the Highland myth is perhaps the most interesting feature of the new Scottish cinema, and it's in this context that *Living Apart Together* points towards what should be the next stage: a return to the city and a similar engagement with the urban myth. Bill Forsyth started there with *That Sinking Feeling* and his new film, *Comfort and Joy*, is set there; Bill Bryden's stage plays *Willie Rough*, *Benny Lynch* and *Civilians* deal with the Scottish urban experience, and his projected biography of Robert Burns offers the opportunity to explore this theme in a crucial historical context; one would equally wish to see Murray Grigor renew his association with Billy Connolly on *ClydeScope* and *Big Banana Feet* and put that arch-critic of Scotland on the screen again; and it would be particularly good to welcome Bill Douglas back for a follow-up to the trail-blazing of *My Childhood, My Ain Folk* and *My Way Home*, the trilogy which inspired the ambitions of several of the film-makers discussed here. There are still many blank spaces on the map, geographically and culturally, and it would be a pleasure to face the task of updating it after another two years of new Scottish cinema. ■

Living Apart Together: B. A. Robertson.





THE JEWEL IN THE CROWN

ANDREW
ROBINSON

It is a nice irony that television should begin transmitting simultaneously two such different epic series, both based on novels about India, as *The Far Pavilions* and *The Jewel in the Crown*. But stranger than fiction is the fact that the same man, Paul Scott, made both series possible: as the author of the Raj Quartet, on which *Jewel* is based, and as the unseen mentor of M. M. Kaye, who admits that, without Scott's advice, she would 'still be struggling somewhere half-way through *The Far Pavilions*'.

The four novels in the Raj Quartet were published between 1966 and 1975 and altogether run to nearly two thousand pages in paperback. When this lovingly reconstructed edifice of British India was finished, a reviewer was tempted to compare it to a long train journey in India, with Scott frequently halting the train to discourse on everything from the Club to Gandhi. To read the entire Quartet is more like doing a very complicated jigsaw puzzle. Events do march towards their historical conclusion, but one absorbs them through a multiplicity of viewpoints (including that of an unseen 'researcher' figure) which flash back and forth in time, across a period from 1942 to the early 60s. Scott brilliantly adds perspective after perspec-

tive on the same events seen through different attitudes, in a search for truth which gives the Quartet its many tones of voice. One confidently trusts that all the information will eventually fall into place, interlocking to make the complete picture. Scott does not disappoint one—he keeps one enthralled—but nor does he give all the pieces one needs. One cannot define properly the magic of India that envelops his characters, any more than the reluctant memsahib Sarah Layton can come close to her own father on his return from prisoner-of-war camp in 1945: 'In India, yes, one could travel great distances. But the greatest distance was between people who were closely related.'

Scott's view of the twilight years of the Raj is panoramic, but it focuses on the reactions of the British in one part of Northern India to the rape of an English girl, Daphne Manners, in mid-1942, by an unknown group of Indians. To her compatriots, to varying degrees, she was suspect from the start, having conceived an affection for an Indian, Hari Kumar, who was entirely educated in English private schools and hates his own Indian roots: a love impossible to fulfil and

sustain under the pressures of the colonial relationship. The imposition of British rule on India, however theoretically justifiable in the minds of even the more liberal of the British, contained the seeds of its own destruction.

It is the gradual souring of the British belief in their own moral superiority which so fascinates Scott. According to Christopher Morahan, the producer and one of the two joint-directors: 'The tension between those who thought they knew best and those who didn't want to be told what was best for them brought about the end of the Indian Empire.' In the view of Sir Denis Forman, Chairman of Granada Television and guiding spirit of the series, the British as colonial masters did not have the Latin American ability to relax and become part of a country, nor the Dutch and French capacity to remain tyrants. 'The British tried to find a way into a country through its fabric; it was a noble ideal but it was pathetic, because it could never succeed.' *Jewel*'s other director, Jim O'Brien, identifies strong echoes of Empire in Britain today and adds that Scott's story is about 'flies caught in amber'. 'The struggle of his characters is their inability to cope with a changing world; that's the real drama. Scott didn't attempt to come to a



Susan Wooldridge as Daphne Manners.



Granada's transport in India.

conclusion; he realised how complex it was.'

Publication of the Quartet did not bring Scott, who died in 1978, the recognition he deserved. Part of the reason must be the peculiar demands made on the reader by his style. O'Brien comments: 'It was because he was working in a particularly confined area of storytelling. Also he wasn't a modernist at all.' Popularity came to Scott only in the last year of his life with the award of the Booker Prize to the Quartet's small epilogue, *Staying On*. 'Simply the most moving novel published in 1977,' according to the chairman of the Booker judges, Philip Larkin.

It was of course the success of *Staying On* for Granada as a television play, with Celia Johnson and Trevor Howard, which persuaded Forman that they should tackle the Quartet. 'The novel has tended to shrink, except in popular fiction, so that it was good to find one on a majestic scale.' He is quite willing to compare it to *War and Peace*: 'The interaction of the British Raj and Indian culture provided the same basic theme as the Napoleonic Wars and the idea of courage and cowardice in *War and Peace*... You may not care about the fate of India and Britain but you do care about the characters, as in *War and Peace*.' Forman, like Scott, saw military service in India, though after the end of the war. 'I felt I had a special relationship with the books and with Scott.'

Would the formidable bulk and literary style of the Quartet actually allow television adaptation? 'One of my concerns was whether it would be susceptible to continuous narrative without filleting it to the extent that it was no longer the book one knew and loved.' With the aid of sheets of wallpaper covered in events from the books, Forman broke the novels down, in parallel with Irene Shubik, the producer of *Staying On*. 'It was an exercise to ensure that before spending five million pounds, there was a reasonable chance of telling a story. I wasn't sure: I'd do exactly the same to *War and Peace*.'

It became fairly clear that an adaptation was feasible, but those involved in its execution are under no illusions about the demanding television they have produced, and the consequent risk of failure. The scriptwriter, Ken Taylor, to whom the breakdowns were passed, was constantly aware of Scott's shadow, but says: 'You can't be snooty about popularisation. The justification must largely be that you bring the book to numbers of people who wouldn't otherwise have read it.' Morahan, declaring his faith in Renoir's belief that everyone has his reasons, comments firmly: 'We're not going to tell people what to think. We've attempted to do justice to every character. But we are also trying to tell a story that could interest as many people as possible.'

O'Brien draws an interesting comparison with *Heat and Dust*. 'It is a much more beautiful film than ours. But it had a lot of sentiment. Our sentiment belongs to the period. What worried me about *Heat and Dust* was that you had two apparently conflicting ages, but they both had the same sentiment—there wasn't an abrasion, there was a nominal difference. Jhabvala wasn't really modern in the modern sequences—so that it didn't really work. Ivory's an archaeologist making films about things gone by—but I still love his movies.' Of *The Far Pavilions* he says with considerable feeling: 'I wish them well. But I think it is the point when I retire from the industry if I find that *Far Pavilions* does well and we do badly. I'll go back to ghetto theatre, if the conclusion is that *Far Pavilions* is a better story.'

The compression of the Quartet into 52-minute episodes suitable for television was in many ways the hardest task of the whole production. Taylor's scripts seemed right to Forman from the first reading. O'Brien comments that Taylor's solution was to concentrate on the characters rather than to reconstruct the novels. Taylor basically agrees: 'The two things that appeal to me are character and narrative. Scott's a marvellous storyteller. You read the characters and

you live with them. And he does this with people you would think would be very dull intrinsically. Isn't that a marvellous ability? During the war I met such girls in India and they were awfully boring—ghastly little memsahibs. In Scott, each one is an individual, they're all interesting.'

The reduction of an extraordinarily complex narrative to a roughly chronological progression was much more feasible than Taylor expected. 'Working on the books I became in awe of their structure. What is amazing is that he never slips up. I thought that when you take them apart and reconstruct them as a conventional chronology, then you'd be in trouble. Not one error! I didn't ever seriously doubt that we would have to restructure as a chronological narrative. I then realised that we would need flashbacks, voice-over which would preserve something of Scott's technique. The big gamble was whether we would keep the echoes of the rape going right through the story—so that although Daphne and Hari are gone, we'd never lose them. Scott has a resonance of counterpoint, and I just prayed that we could manage to find enough ways to keep that resonance going.'

When Taylor began work, Forman and Shubik had already agreed that Daphne Manners and Hari Kumar must be off the stage by the end of three episodes, 'otherwise there was a very serious danger of the audience not wishing to relinquish those characters.' At the outset Taylor was uncomfortably aware of how much would be left out in adaptation; during the writing, 'It was a desperate struggle. I wanted more elbow room all the time.' At an early stage it was clear to him that the usual 13-episode structure would have to be abandoned, but it was not known exactly how many there should be. Taylor eventually produced fourteen episodes, which expanded to fifteen on shooting. 'There's a speed at which scenes can be played. You can knock out the words but you can't knock out the space between the actions. There were a lot of very intense scenes.'



Sir Denis Forman, Christopher Morahan.



Shooting at Udaipur. Jim O'Brien in peaked cap.

Much of the dialogue was effortlessly transferred from the novels. Taylor himself recalls the slang and intonations of the time, both British and Indian, from his own experience there and from the tunes of those years running in his head while writing. 'Scott must have done it too. Perron sings "Do I worry?" in the bath as he observes the feet of Merrick's dreadful bearer visible under the door. "Do I worry?" he says, "You can bet your life I do," as he pulls open the door.'

Scott's story is played out against a political and historical canvas, highly integrated with the personal, and wider than the series can attempt to describe, but it has to show enough for the related behaviour of the characters to make sense. Lack of audience familiarity with the events of 1942-47 in India is sometimes a worry, and Taylor says: 'I just hope they will understand.' Some of this understanding will come from the use of newsreels throughout the series—from Pathé, the National Film Archive and the Imperial War Museum—as a kind of punctuation,' to quote Morahan. 'It arose initially because one editor asked me what the Battle of Burma was about? What did Nehru do? We came towards archive footage naturally as a pithy and genuine narrative device, and then we discovered other potencies. We "discovered" the affinity with Scott's textual style. But the most important reason was to give the story a context to do with time: to relate what happens within the film, which is a representation of the past, to the past's view of itself.'

Forman, who saw such newsreels at the time, says that 'any intelligent person was insulted by the newsreels.' In making the series, some forty years later, he was really shocked by their patronising smugness: 'I felt it was a way of enlarging the feeling in the series. My instinct told me we've got to try it. The idea is not to chart events but to give the viewer a feeling of how the British saw the British during the war.' In one of Morahan's favourite lines a commentator announces proudly, over the grimy faces of Brits in Burma, 'There are plenty of coloured

boys out East who can lend a hand'—a view shared by some of Scott's characters. Morahan invokes 'a kind of Brechtian alienation process' in explanation: 'Perhaps, by looking at the newsreel and the story in juxtaposition, you're able to use your own mind. Don't lose yourself entirely in the story and believe that it is happening. Remember that the atmosphere in which it took place was the atmosphere in which the newsreels were written.' In this way, a long-forgotten ceremony in which King George pins a VC on a simple Gurkha soldier, gives a new dimension to the shifting perceptions of the traditional paternal relationship between officers and men in Scott's story.

In their search for potent images, the directors have discovered them both in the content of Scott's work and in its style. The *suttee*, or self-immolation, of the failed missionary Miss Crane in her blazing garden hut; the dancing Siva image that takes possession of Daphne Manners' imagination; the repeated brooding view of Hari Kumar behind bars; Daphne Manners returning after her death in childbirth; all these images try to reinforce Scott's rather bleak, uneasy view of the British in India, the pattern behind all the madness and brutality.

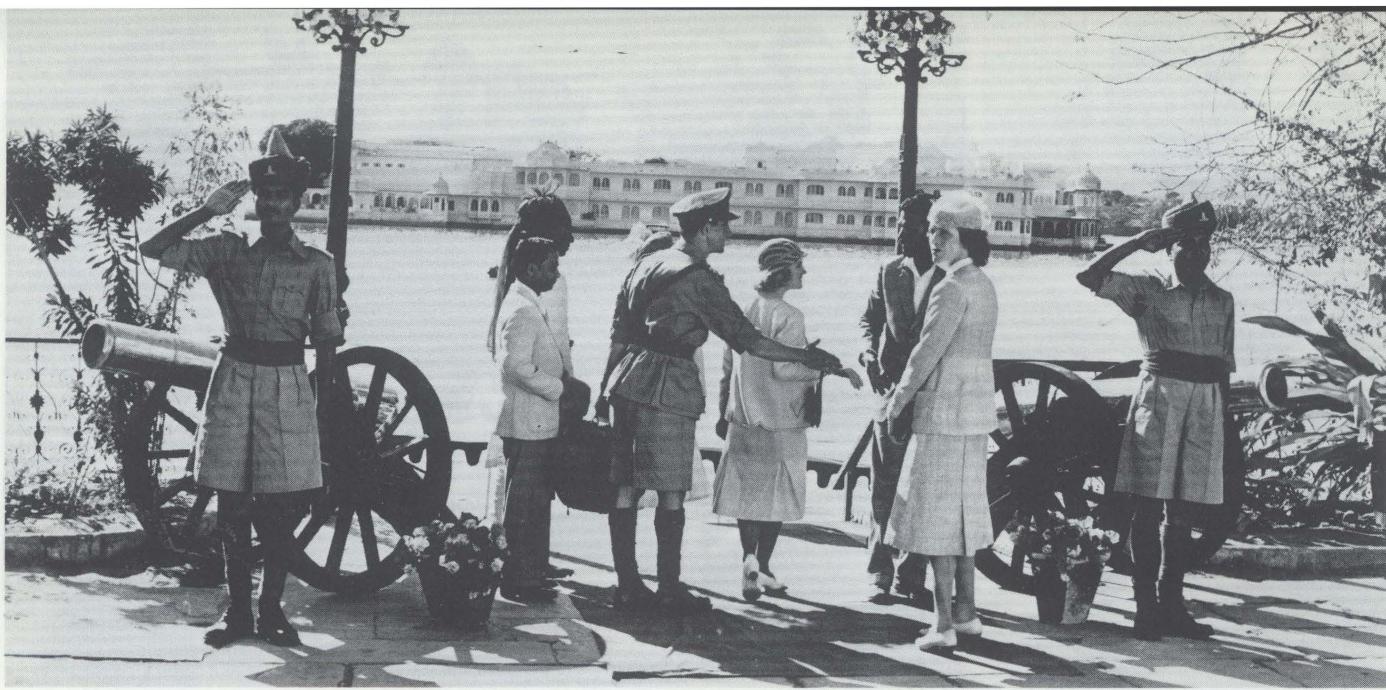
Before embarking on this series, Morahan had no personal interest in India, though family connections do exist. He has worked in television and theatre since the early 50s and was an associate director at the National Theatre at the time he read the Quartet and heard of Granada's interest in the idea. He started initial planning on the production in the summer of 1980, by which time the scripts were in progress. Interestingly, at that time, Granada were considering the series for video and film, 'as a solution to long distances and big crews,' to quote Forman. Morahan was not in favour. 'When I returned from India, I suggested that sensibly Granada shouldn't just go to India for the locations and do the interiors in the studio, they should take a leaf out of *Staying On* and conceive the

whole series as film.' Ray Goode, *Jewel's* lighting cameraman, also responsible for *Brideshead*, entirely agrees: 'Mixing video and film is not satisfactory—*Hard Times* was spoiled by this.'

O'Brien joined the project rather later than Morahan. His professional background is in relatively fringe theatre and in directing plays for television with a strong social comment. He had not met Morahan before. 'Some people consider us quite a remarkable combination—but not a love-match. We always operate on the basis of concern only for what we are doing. It's a relationship in which neither of us holds back. We learnt in the casting period, when we argued violently, and we took the extraordinary option of working on alternate episodes.' This was arranged before they agreed to work together. 'It seemed very important that we should force ourselves to rub up against each other as much as possible. I'd never want to work with actors I wouldn't have cast.' This has actually meant that Morahan has directed the even-numbered episodes and O'Brien the odd-numbered.

They edit their own episodes and then swap notes on each other's work. 'I think Christopher has given me more support, which is right. He is senior and he is the producer. I'm usually grateful for not having to worry about that.' Both directors agree in their respect for Forman, who has remained closely in touch with the project throughout, including viewing all the rushes in England while the team waited anxiously each day in India. Without his backing, O'Brien points out, 'Any company would have said forget it. He is profoundly fond of the work and has put in an awful lot of effort to make it possible.'

The planning of *Jewel* drew quite heavily on the experiences of *Staying On*: 'It found its way into the bloodstream of Granada,' according to Forman. 'The lessons were fairly primitive ones. Food: we had to take our own kitchen. Health: we had to take our own doctor. Don't shut people up in two hotels twenty miles apart. But the main lesson was that it was possible to take a big crew to India,



Wedding party; in the background the Lake Palace at Udaipur.

feed it and water it and get high quality film back.'

Morahan made three reconnaissance trips to India, with varying numbers of colleagues, before he was able to tell Granada what the series would cost: about £5½ million, 'more than Granada wanted.' Forman did not seriously consider co-production: 'If one wants freedom of action, one can't go around consulting other people. One has to be in sole command.' After the series was made, it was bought by Mobil for Public Broadcasting in the United States. The budget was not generous but in fact the team came back from the four months' shooting in India in May 1982 on time and slightly under budget.

One of the toughest problems had to be the analysis of suitable locations in India and the consequent decisions as to where to shoot: in India, or, bravely in some cases, in England with both exterior and studio sets. Scott's towns, basically in Northern India, are not immediately identifiable and Morahan tried to guess where they were, 'There was some similarity between Mayapore and Cawnpore. For Pankot, the closest hill-station is Naini Tal.' In the event, the locations used were in Udaipur, Mysore in the South, Simla and of course Kashmir. 'We wanted to find an India which hadn't been changed. Udaipur and Mysore were Princely States up to 1947; they weren't industrialised and much of the detail is largely unchanged. In Udaipur nothing quite fitted but we were inspired. It seemed to have a great deal of unchanged urban quality, also countryside of really ravishing beauty and a number of palaces—a magnificent city altogether.' There were still large gaps. Mysore eventually provided the MacGregor House that was missing from Udaipur. Naini Tal was abandoned and Rose Cottage nearly built in England with its garden in India; finally it was all located near Simla. Mirat and Mayapore were created from a mixture of the locations.

The music for *Jewel* is of particular interest. The composer is George Fenton, who worked with Ravi Shankar on

Gandhi. O'Brien finds it a fascinating challenge: 'What I've learnt from George is that the thought you bring to the music is every bit as important as what you compose. It's not a mechanism for coping with a slow scene.'

Fenton is conscious that East-West musical fusions—not especially those for film—have not so far been successful. 'The reason is that Indian classical music is like jazz—in that it's an established ritualised system, yet something happens when a great musician plays. In his first concerto, Shankar hasn't given himself room to express the raga. The right framework will allow Indian instruments to speak with their own voice. One difficulty is that nearly all the music is devotional and so it is difficult to get tension into it; everybody sounds too involved. The excitement is very innocent and there is little threat. Consider the "roosting" quality of a drone; when the friendly drone begins, you feel all right.'

There is a fine, poignant scene that illustrates Fenton's preoccupations well; it is between Hari and Daphne quite early in their relationship, as they shelter from the monsoon in the ruined pavilion where they will much later make love, and Daphne will be raped. It is the first theme of the series. 'It's a cor anglais, not an oboe. Particularly when it is played higher up, it has a quality that is not quite as familiar, as labelled as an oboe. Oboes are so pastoral and have so many associations. The cor anglais is playing a raga. Although the strings move, basically they are droning. The cor anglais is played by someone who has studied Indian music. I wrote it with a very odd time signature, in Western terms, so that it sounds as if it's playing rather freely. It's not *alap* but it has an exploratory sense about it, searching for the melody. I hoped that the specific sound, and certain specific phrases in it, would transmit itself as a melody and become a tune for the audience, without them realising it is a raga.'

Fenton also has ideas about the use of the *sarangi* in the West, with its 'crazy, screaming sound' used to such emotive

effect in Satyajit Ray's *Pather Panchali* (scored by Ravi Shankar incidentally) some twenty-five years ago. 'The sound is alien because of the scales but it is less alien than it used to be. The reason is that certain of its qualities are similar to those of electric guitars.'

Western music will also make its presence felt, in military music and in pieces 'that express the English wherever they are—like Elgar.' But Fenton does not plan to give the score a recognisable, period sound. 'The best way to avoid cliché is studiously to remain ignorant about what the clichés are.' Such a comment might serve to describe the philosophy of those making the series. In Forman's view, 'If it's profitable, enjoyable and worthwhile, then we've won.' In O'Brien's, 'Our project doesn't have ambitions as a great work of art. It does have ambitions as a good story.' Morahan comments simply, 'I hope Scott would like what we have done.' So perhaps he and his vast creation should have the last word on the character present in every scene of the series: India.

India exerted an enduring fascination; he was hooked, a wanderer in search of a home. Shortly before he died, he wrote this about such feelings: 'I have never seen Ooty, or Lucknow, or the view of the snowcapped peaks from Darjeeling. But these are merely sights and I am no sightseer. My inclination is by no means to stay put but to seek here and there abroad occasions and conditions of that kind of repose which is at once to do with feeling at home and feeling oneself on the brink of understanding that there is really no such place except in the warmth of human exchange, because a land and its artifacts are inanimate and each of us settles the question of their beauty or ugliness and fitness to live in or with, for himself.' The same feeling, translated from a morning raga, may be found on the final page of *The Jewel in the Crown*: 'Oh, my father's servants, bring my palanquin. I am going to the land of my husband. All my companions are scattered. They have gone to different homes.'

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Ray Off Set

Bibekananda Ray

The type above is Ray's own design: Ray Roman.

Some years ago, Satyajit Ray was asked by an interviewer what he might have done if his first film, *Pather Panchali*, had failed. Ray paused before slowly answering, 'That's a hypothetical question.' To another interviewer, he once confided that if he had not been a filmmaker he might have become an ambassador. But when he was only six he had told his little cousin Ruby, 'I'll be a filmmaker and go to Germany and come back.' Ruby wanted him to be a doctor.

Ray was born in Calcutta on 2 May 1921, when Bengali silent cinema was just two years old. The idea of filmmaking must have come from the Hollywood adventure pictures he saw as a small boy. The association with Germany probably had to do with the fact that Nitin Bose, his great-aunt's son and a pioneer cameraman and director of Bengali silent films, had gone to Germany to study cinematography. Ray was a cinema addict in his adolescence, like most Bengali boys, but with the slowly emerging difference that he looked away from the stars to directors and cameramen, and when the passion grew upon him in his

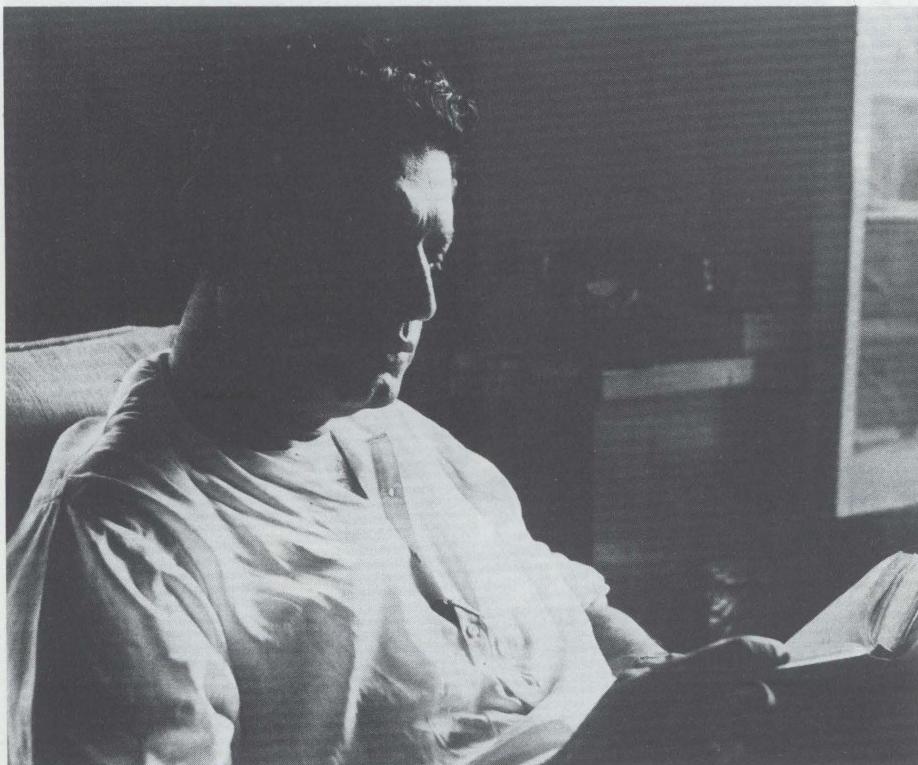
late teens, he would take down notes of cutting, editing and camera angle in the darkness of the theatre. He was in his early thirties when he came to make *Pather Panchali*, at first shooting the film with friends and admiring amateurs on holidays and at weekends. It is fascinating to speculate what course he might have followed if it had been a failure. Might he, for instance, have pursued his career as a graphic artist?

In 1940, Ray graduated with honours in economics (not really his choice) from Calcutta's Presidency College. He went on to Santiniketan, Rabindranath Tagore's open-air university some 200 kilometres northwest of Calcutta, to study graphic design and fine arts, despite his own resistance to its slightly effeminate culture. Tagore had been a family friend since around 1900; Ray's mother was insistent that he should go to Santiniketan, and this was also supposed to be the wish of his father, who died when Ray was only two years old, as recorded by Tagore at a seance in his old age. At Santiniketan (which literally means an 'Abode of Peace'), Ray became

tuned, as it were, to the essence of Bengal; and he learned from his instructor, Nandalal Bose, how to draw, say, a tree organically—'from the roots to the branches as the tree grows.'

Ray was halfway through his diploma course, and on a study tour of cave paintings of Central India, when news came of Japanese bombing raids. He returned to Calcutta to give company to his mother at the height of the war. A few months later, on 1 April 1943, he went to work for the firm of D. J. Keymer, a British-owned advertising agency in Calcutta, by whom he was still employed at the time of *Pather Panchali*. He started out as a junior layout artist on a salary of about twenty dollars a month and in five or six years had become art director at the Calcutta office. In April 1950 he went to London, to work in Keymer's head office. On the day he arrived, he has recorded that he saw *Bicycle Thieves*—the first of ninety-nine films that he and his newly married wife, Bijoya, were to see in about four months.

Ray only finally left the advertising agency in 1956. Few people have seen the work he did for Keymer's, and examples of it may not have been preserved, though one of the posters he designed during his time in London was a huge success. He had already, however,



Poster drawn by Ray for
Goopy Gyne, Bagha Byne.

Satyajit Ray at home.

acquired a reputation for book illustrations and cover design. A senior colleague at Keymer, Dilip Gupta, also ran a publishing concern, Signet Press, in Central Calcutta, and got Ray to design covers, illustrations, dust jackets, title pages, typography and calligraphy for a number of juvenile and poetry books. Ray soon gave a new splendour to old Bengali characters and alphabets, as his



An illustration for *Sandesh*: graphic on woodcut.

grandfather, a pioneer in halftone block-making, had sought to do with his printing firm U. Ray and Sons, at Garhpar in North Calcutta, where the Rays lived until the late 1920s. Ray's cover designs often involved ingenious type setting from different fonts, as later in his film scores he was to blend apparently disparate musical instruments and notes (memorably in the ghosts' dance sequence of *Goopy Gyne, Bagha Byne*). He imitated Moghul miniature painting for *Rajkahini*, tales of Rajasthan's heroes. A few hairy black vertical stripes with a round scrawny patch on both front and back covers of Jim Corbett's *Man-Eaters of Kumaon* delighted children with its suggestion of a hunter's bullet passing through a tiger skin.

In the early 50s, Ray's reputation in Calcutta was as 'the enormously tall son of the poet Sukumar Ray, who draws magical covers and illustrations for *Signet*.' His lines were few, simple and bold; his ideas striking and original. His first assignment was to illustrate an abridged children's version of *Pather Panchali*, a well-known novel by an obscure teacher which had been published in the early 30s, and it was while doing these drawings that he was struck by the book's potential as a film. Before filming, he drew the entire script in wash sketches, which he later donated to the Cinémathèque Française. He draws posters and publicity brochures for his own films and even designs the covers for the soundtrack records. His illustrations these days are confined to those for detective and science fiction stories and for *Sandesh*, the children's monthly which his grandfather had started in 1913 and which Ray himself revived in 1961, Tagore's centenary year, thirty years after it had gone out of business. (*Sandesh* means 'news' in Sanskrit and Hindi and 'milk-candy' in Bengali: Ray still co-edits it with his cousins, Mrs Lila Mazumdar and Mrs Nalini Das.)

For the children's edition of *Pather Panchali*, Ray's line and wash drawings suggested the moist vegetation of rural Bengal, the penury of the area, the children running across faraway fields of wild

reeds to see the train go by. To this day, his sketches have remained a collage of bold and brief lines, as in his numerous drawings for *Sandesh*. He drew his future wife, Bijoya Das, with just a few strokes, lying on the floor during a midday siesta. For the covers of books of Jibanananda Das' poems, he did line drawings of a woman's face, ethereal images in a style which could be compared with Tagore's doodles, or with Matisse or Paul Klee. Das' early poems, incidentally, were enormously popular in the 50s, and Ray's designs only added to the legend of the poet as the most romantic since Tagore.

This highly developed and original graphic sense persisted in, and also enriched, the film-maker. The credit titles of *Pather Panchali* were a striking departure from existing practice in the mid-50s—an imitation of ancient calligraphic manuscripts of scriptures, written by Ray himself on coarse handmade paper to suggest the rambling folk element of the story. *Panchali* is a genre of popular scripture, read by pious country women by lamplight with a musical intonation, and the parallel in Ray's film is emphasised by Ravi Shankar's score. Often the credit titles of his films merge with the mood of the story. The logo of *Devi* (1960), for instance, was designed by Ray after the scaffold of a *durgah* image—the main motif of this story about a woman's disastrous obsession, induced by her father-in-law, that she may be not an ordinary mortal but the goddess Kali incarnate. But Ray's experience as a sketch artist came in handy in other ways. For casting a new film, he would often draw sketches of the type he was looking for and give them to friends and assistants to locate. Four Apus in the trilogy were found and cast in this way.

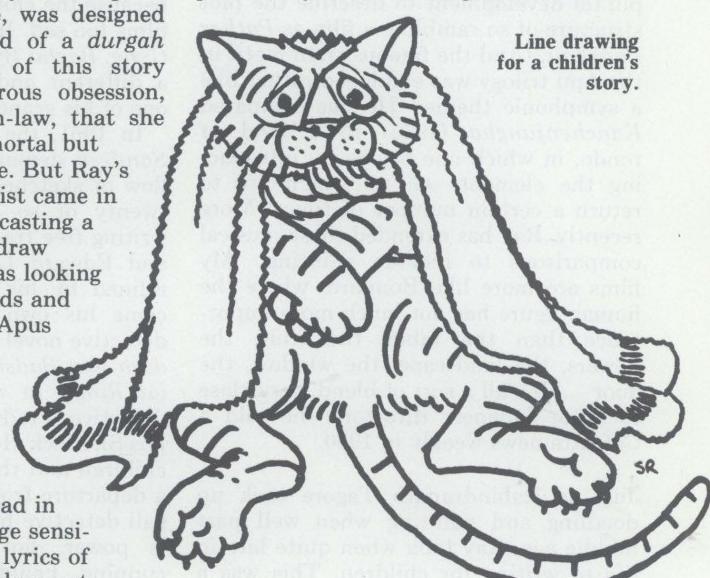
But Ray is not only a graphic artist: his experience of music and aptitude for it has also stood him in good stead in his film-making. An average sensitive Bengali listens to the lyrics of Tagore in childhood, and does not



Pather Panchali brochure cover.

progress much beyond them. Ray was still an adolescent when he took to Western classical music, saving his pocket money to buy new gramophone records from T. E. Bevan at Dalhousie Square or looking for shop-soiled 78s in a shabby second-hand market near Sealdah station. While he loved Tagore's lyrics, he was not much drawn to Indian classical music—a trait also marked in great Bengali writers like Tagore and the novelist Sarat Chandra Chatterjee. Ray was to acquire a taste for it much later, and would often sit through a night-long classical soirée in Calcutta, when others had dozed off or left. He can read and write both Western and Indian notations, and composes his background scores and lyrics in both to aid his musicians. But his interest in Western music is more acquired than hereditary. He first read about Beethoven in a *Book of Knowledge* when he was a child, developed a hero-worship for him, and even now might be ready, given an offer, to do a film biography. Beethoven became his 'consumming interest' at the age of sixteen, when he would go to bed with a miniature score to listen to records or the radio.

Ray did not, however, venture to compose the lyrics and background scores of



Line drawing for a children's story.

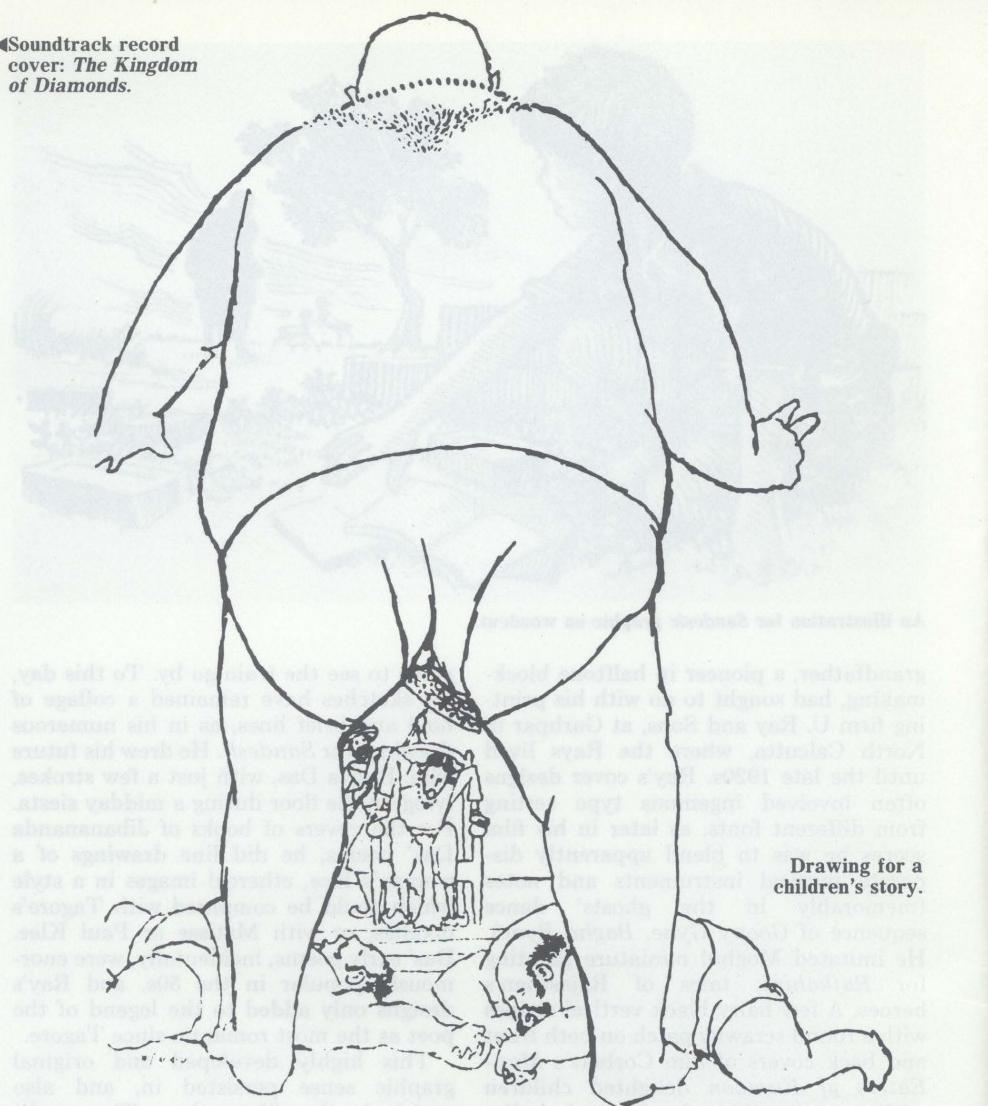


◀ Soundtrack record cover: *The Kingdom of Diamonds*.

his early films. This was left to eminent musicians like Ravi Shankar (the Apu trilogy, *Paras Pather*), Vilayat Khan (*Jalsaghar*) and Ali Akbar (*Devi*). The first lyric he wrote was the begging minstrel's song in *Devi*, patterned on the devotional songs of the eighteenth century saint, Ramprasad. He began composing background scores with *Teen Kanya* (*Two Daughters*, 1961), since he found that the classical instrumentalists, however excellent their work in other respects, lacked a background and a sense of a proper film score. Ray's own memory for music is said to be phenomenal: he could master a whole symphony after listening to it only three times. His ideal film score remains Prokofiev's for *Ivan the Terrible*. Over the last twenty-two years, he has composed his own scores for eighteen features and six short films, and each time he comes up with a surprise. He thinks that cinema as a medium is closer to Western music than to Indian, because in Indian music the concept of inflexible time does not exist. No Indian music, he says, resembles a sonata or a symphony, which has a beginning and an end no matter who the interpreter may be. In the cinema, Ray feels that the use of a musical structure allows him to take liberties with the material.

Charulata, for instance, is patterned after a Mozart symphony ('I thought endlessly of Mozart while making the film,' Ray told Georges Sadoul). He has used the musical metaphor of contrapuntal development to describe the plot structure of so rambling a film as *Pather Panchali*. (And the famous train motif in the Apu trilogy was employed rather like a symphonic theme.) He has compared *Kanchenjungha* (1962) to a kind of rondo, in which one begins by introducing the elements ABCDE which are to return a certain number of times. More recently, Ray has extended these musical comparisons to include painting: 'My films are more like Bonnard, where the human figure has not much more importance than the table, the fruit, the flowers, the landscape, the window, the door... It's all a sort of blend, very close to some Japanese directors,' he told a Calcutta news weekly in 1980.

Just as Rabindranath Tagore took up doodling and painting when well past middle age, Ray took when quite late in life to writing for children. This was a



Drawing for a children's story.

family tradition (writing is a hobby endemic in Bengal, though Ray had hardly dabbled in it before), and he had translated his father's nonsense verses and limericks in his spare time and between journeys at airports. No one unfamiliar with Bengal can imagine the glee these verses arouse in children, but from his son's translations one can see Edward Lear and Lewis Carroll peeping through. But Ray himself began his original writing primarily to amuse his only son, Sandip (now himself a film-maker), because the child found his father's early films too sad. In 1968 he directed *Goopy Gyne, Bagha Byne* to please Sandip with a different and merrier film, based on one of his grandfather's stories.

In 1961, the revival of the magazine *Sandesh* demanded from Ray a regular flow of sketches and illustrations—some twenty or so a month. He began by writing free translations of Lewis Carroll and Edward Lear—a genre begun and refined by his short-lived father. Soon came his own short stories. The first detective novel that he serialised in *Sandesh* was *Badshahi Aangti* (*The Imperial Ring*), in which he introduced the detective Pradosh Mitra, alias Feluda. His Sherlock Holmes caught on first with children and then with adult readers, as a departure from the usual style of Bengali detective hero. In Feluda knowledge is power, not physical acrobatics or cunning. Feluda practises yoga, is the

sweetest social creature, has a highly logical mind, knows a bit of everything, but is a polymath without conceit (in this perhaps a bit like Ray himself). Bengali children love this restless, truth-hunting type.

Ray also fathered the science fiction genre in Bengali, with his invention of Professor Shanku, the wizard of *Goopy Gyne, Bagha Byne*. Ray writes at least one novel a year in each genre—already more than a dozen featuring Feluda and half a dozen on Professor Shanku, apart from some three dozen short stories. The books stay on the best-seller lists for months. The Feluda series has already yielded a delightful film, *The Elephant God* (1978). Professor Shanku, however, still awaits the film treatment which he would have received if Ray's *Alien* project had not fallen through.

In recent years Ray's health has not been good, and last autumn he suffered a severe heart attack. But he has always been an exceptionally busy person. He usually shoots for between three and six months of any year; when not shooting he is writing, designing, illustrating. A minor interest is typography—also a family obsession. For an American firm, Ray devised a new typeface, Ray Roman and Ray Bizarre. He would like to design new Bengali typefaces and to revive an archaic eighteenth century form which, he says, is 'much more sensible' than the

BABURAM THE SNAKE CHARMER

Hullo there, Baburam—what have you got in there?
Snakes? Aha!—and do you think there's one that you
could spare?
You know, I'd love to have one, but let me tell you this—
The ones that bite aren't right for me,
nor the ones that hiss.
I'd also skip the ones that butt, and the ones that whistle,
Or the ones that slink about, or show their fangs,
or bristle.
As for eating habits, I think it would be nice
To go for ones that only take a meal of milk and rice.
I'm sure you know the kind of snakes I want
from what I've said,
Do let me have one, Baburam, so I could bash its head.

From *Abol Tabol*, a collection of nonsense rhymes.
Text by Sukumar Ray.
Translated from the Bengali by Satyajit Ray.



Ray's translation of one of his father's rhymes.

present ones. In music, he intends some day to produce an opera like Tagore's.

Calcutta has a legion of literary editors, and Ray seldom lets them down when they ask him for an article, an interview or an illustration. People aspiring to roles in his films call on him at his flat in Bishop Lefroy Road without an appointment and without being screened by a secretary. He is too well-known a figure to appear in public without being gazed at, surrounded by autograph hunters or embarrassed by questioners. For some years now, however, he has given expression, both at home and abroad, to increasing political disillusionment about

the state of his country. 'There is none whom one could look up to,' he reportedly said during his Guardian Lecture at the NFT in London in 1982. He is critical these days of Mrs Gandhi, like her father an admirer of Ray, and told an eminent New Delhi news magazine that she was 'piling mistakes on mistakes, the gravest being Emergency.' He is also critical, however, of the Indian Communist Party for its factionalism, and of his Marxist friends and colleagues for compromising with the establishment for material advancement.

As an artist, Ray has chosen to remain apolitical and uncompromising, and has

often defended this attitude. As a private citizen, during the 1960s, he lent support to various mass protests. He took part, for instance, in a march by intellectuals in Calcutta to protest against the controversial food policy which was resulting in conditions of near famine, and gave his signature to a mass Marxist protest against the imposition of President's Rule in West Bengal in 1969. In 1961 he criticised the ugly facade of Calcutta's Rabindra Sadan, one of a chain of cultural centres built by the government in each state capital in Tagore's centenary year.

Ray's latest production, *Ghare Baire*, is based on a Tagore story and completes a cycle in his work: it was the first story that he scripted, well before *Pather Panchali*, back in 1946. Occasionally Ray has suggested that he may gradually retreat from film-making and leave it to his son, whose first film *Phatikchand* featured a Satyajit Ray script and musical score. He has a few more compulsions, like making the third sequel to the *Goopy Bagha* theme and a companion TV short to the 1982 *Sadgati*. But gradually, since about the mid-60s, the 'other' Ray, whom he pushed into the wings in 1956 with the success of *Pather Panchali*, has been playing a larger role. If and when Ray decides to give up film-making, it will be to devote himself to music, graphics and literature—a return to a century of family tradition. ■

DANIEL

(15)

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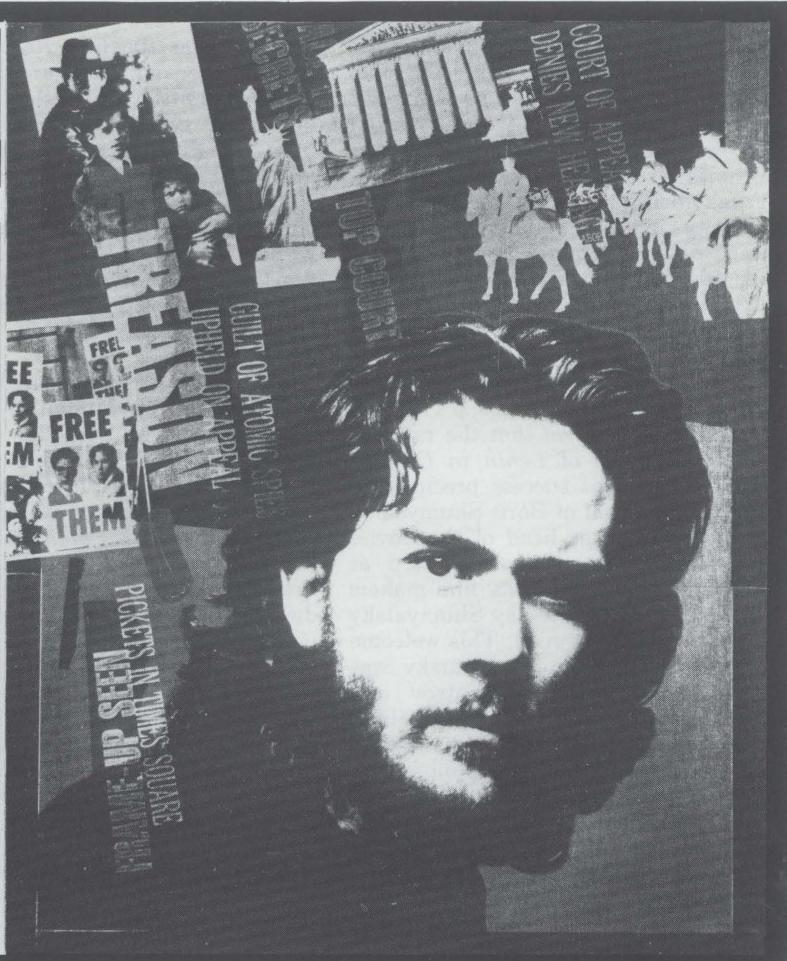


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Re-editing history: Lenin in October

1937 THEN & NOW 1983

Alexander Sesonske

On 6 November 1937, the eve of the twentieth anniversary of the October revolution, Mikhail Romm's *Lenin in October* opened at Moscow's Bolshoi Theatre. Hailed as a new Soviet masterpiece, it quickly brought awards to its director and leading actors. A few months later *Lenin in October* reached New York, where its exhibitor thought the film important enough to have its American premiere in not one but two theatres at opposite ends of Times Square. The date, appropriately enough, was 1 April 1938.

Films about the revolution are hardly a novelty in the USSR, but this one seemed different enough to provoke two Russian film historians, writing some forty years later, to cite the night of its premiere as a 'memorable date in the history of Soviet cinema' (Y. Vorontsov and I. Rachuk, *The Phenomenon of the Soviet Cinema*, Moscow 1980, p 112). Jay Leyda tells us in *Kino* that the rapidity of the production of *Lenin in October* and its subsequent success precipitated the abrupt removal of Boris Shumyatsky from his position as head of the Soviet film industry—an event celebrated at parties given by Moscow's film-makers on 9 January 1938, the day Shumyatsky was denounced in *Pravda*. This welcome departure of tovarich Shumyatsky was not, of course, what Vorontsov and Rachuk had in mind in calling the film a major event. Rather, they credit it with having presented a new 'vitally important theme in Soviet cinema', the treatment of Lenin's life and work on the screen, happily inaugurated here in Boris Shchukin's vivid performance as the great revolutionary hero who had died in 1924. Though they discuss *Lenin in October* at length, Vorontsov and Rachuk fail to mention a second new theme introduced

in this film, one more radical in its departure from tradition and with much greater potential for rapid growth—the portrayal of Joseph Stalin, a living hero, as a character in film.

In 1934 *Chapayev* had been praised in the USSR (and by left-wing film critics elsewhere) as the first Russian masterpiece of the sound film era. Its resounding success firmly established what would henceforth be the official style of Soviet film—socialist realism. The age of experiment had ended; the great project of the 1920s, to create socialist films that were anti-bourgeois in both form and content, withered away as the directors of those films stepped forward to confess their errors and plead for the guidance of the Communist Party so that they might make amends.

Among the errors confessed was that of creating the film without a hero, which subordinates its nearly anonymous individuals to the movement of the mass that constitutes the decisive action of the film—the most famous example being, of course, *Battleship Potemkin*. *Chapayev* bears no resemblance to this; from its first shots the hero dominates the scene, directing and rallying the masses who move at his command.

But this hero also needs direction; fearless and charismatic, he is also impulsive and uneducated and doesn't really understand all the demands of the revolution. So Furmanov, the political commissar, becomes Chapayev's teacher and guide, transforming this untutored military genius into a proper Red Army commander, the prototype for cinema of the 'positive hero' demanded by socialist realism. Chapayev sings folk songs with his men, illustrates strategy with boiled potatoes, encourages the love affair

between his orderly Petka and the girl machine-gunner Anna. Furmanov usually remains in the background, less humanised; he never interferes with military decisions but firmly establishes the authority of the Communist Party. In anger Chapayev asks, 'Who commands this division, you or I?' Furmanov answers, 'You—and I,' and Chapayev gradually learns the wisdom of this answer. For Furmanov always gives sound advice; the unsubtle message of the film is that of the infallible and central role of the Communist Party in the civil war.

The contradiction that had beset Soviet cinema in the 1920s opposed anti-bourgeois formal experimentation to the demand that Russian directors produce films accessible to the millions; for the profit motives of Hollywood film-making had led to the discovery of the narrative forms most accessible to the mass audience. 'Formalism' became a serious political sin, but with socialist realism the contradiction was resolved by embracing the bourgeois forms. *Chapayev*, eminently accessible to the millions, is indistinguishable in its form from Hollywood films, even adhering to the maxim that every successful film must contain a love story. Maxim Gorky praised the makers of *Chapayev*. 'They were not lured by the tricks of formalist experimenters.' And in 1935 even Eisenstein, that incorrigible formalist experimenter, found it necessary to deny that this capitulation to the bourgeois enemy was a regression; rather, he claimed, Soviet cinema was embarked on a new progressive phase 'into the direction of deepening and broadening the thematic and ideological formulation of questions and problems within the content of the film'. (*Kino*, p 318).

The major Soviet cinema event of 1937, *Lenin in October*, follows *Chapayev* closely in both form and content. Like its predecessor an historical film based on actual events, *Lenin in October* too looks like a Hollywood product, with clear continuity, smoothly edited. Its positive hero, Lenin, is dynamic, decisive and very human. He chuckles over baby clothes, listens attentively to a letter from a peasant, worries that his bodyguard Vasili doesn't get enough sleep, while he himself sleeps on the floor under a borrowed coat. There is even the hint of a love story in the scenes with Vasili and his pregnant wife. And, as in *Chapayev*, a strong background figure provides support for the positive hero. In *Lenin in October* the counterpart to Furmanov is Joseph Stalin. Arriving in Petrograd from Finland, Lenin immediately asks to see Comrade Stalin. Henceforth Stalin remains an impassive, impressive force sustaining and protecting Lenin. In the crucial central committee meetings Stalin's opinions coincide with those of Lenin, while Trotsky, Kamenev and Zinoviev are denounced as fools or traitors. Unlike *Chapayev*, Lenin does not, of course, need to be educated and guided, hence Stalin's role is more that of disciple than mentor. Still, as with Furmanov, his opinions are always

right and his advice always wise.

On the fateful night of the revolution Stalin stands over the map-table, appearing to be a central figure in directing the assault. Then, when the Winter Palace has been taken and the Provisional Government deposed, Lenin appears to announce the victory of the socialist revolution. As Lenin reaches the podium in the crowded auditorium, a peasant-soldier confirms the humanised portrait that the film has presented by exclaiming, 'He's just like everybody else.' When Lenin begins to speak Stalin moves across the frame behind him, past two Baltic sailors standing under a revolutionary banner. The film's final image shows Lenin in the foreground with right hand raised; behind him, on his left, strong and silent under the Soviet banner, stands Joseph Stalin.

This was the film as it appeared in the print I showed to a class in Soviet cinema in 1980; *Lenin in October* as it had been made in 1937. To my knowledge no critic of the late 30s made much of the appearance of Stalin in the film. Frank Nugent, in a long and positive review in the *New York Times*, praised Shchukin's performance and remarked on the humanising of Lenin, adding only, 'We do not believe that Stalin bulked as importantly in 1917 as he does in this 1937 film of 1917.'

But *Lenin in October* was only the beginning. Early 1939 saw two further works in which Lenin and Stalin appear as characters, first *The Vyborg Side*, the third episode of Kozintsev and Trauberg's Maxim trilogy, then Romm's sequel *Lenin in 1918*. In both these films Mikhail Gelovani takes over the role of Stalin, beginning a career in this role that would last through twenty films and nearly fifteen years and would soon no longer be limited to forming an impressive background figure to the dead but immortal Lenin. Rather, as Stalin became the central character of the films, the task became that of immortalising a living hero who becomes the incarnation of history and of the infallible, omniscient wisdom of the Communist Party—a process analysed in detail by André Bazin in 1950 in 'Le Mythe de Staline

and to show what kind of people survive after a short and hard life in prison and the
obliged to work under such conditions would include those who

1983



Stalin's ear is still visible, but this shot was cut at the frame before his face could be seen.

dans le Cinéma Soviétique'. But Bazin does not note that the creation of this myth begins in *Lenin in October*.

In the spring of 1983 I reported these facts of film history to my students as I prepared once again to show them *Lenin in October*. When the projection began I noted, idly, that there was no date on the print and that the name of I. Golshtab, the actor who plays Stalin, did not appear in the credits. Lenin arrives in Petrograd, but does not ask to see Comrade Stalin. I began to doubt my memory, then to watch in angered amazement as the action progressed. Every trace of Stalin had disappeared from the film; no identifiable image remains.

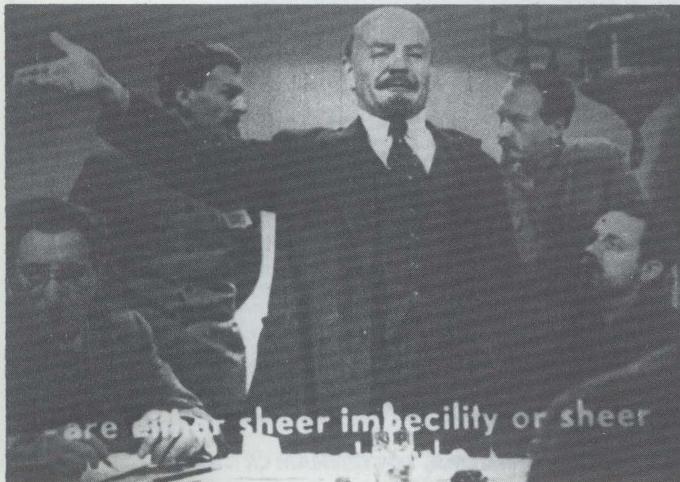
The next day an irate call to the American distributor brought an apology and this, perhaps credible, explanation: when the rights to a number of Russian

films had been acquired from the former distributor, the old print of *Lenin in October* was found to be spliced and worn. There was no negative available in the USA, so a new print had been imported—through the Russian embassy.

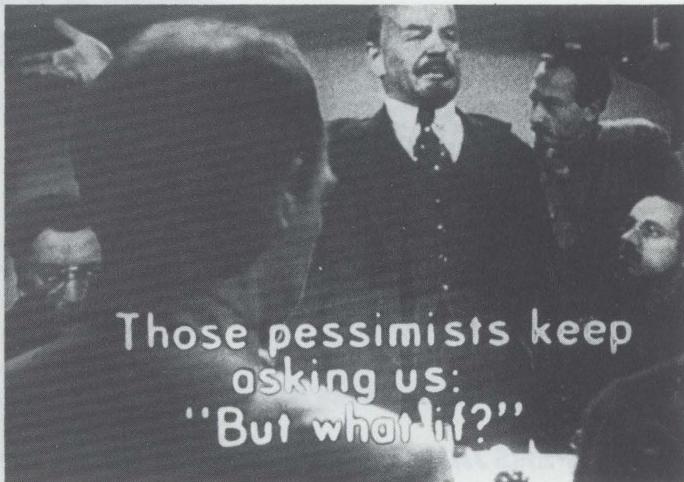
The job of eliminating Stalin from the film has been done with care and skill. Some shots have simply been cut out, but since Stalin almost invariably appeared in shots which also include Lenin, this method could not be pursued far without destroying the film. Occasionally a shot is cut at precisely the frame where Stalin, coming through a door or from behind someone, could be recognised. But the primary method of altering the film has been to back project it, then rephotograph the images after strategically placing a large foreground figure, usually a Baltic sailor, to block

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out the image of Stalin while leaving Lenin still visible. Hence *Lenin in October* now abounds in apparently deep-focus shots that were not at all characteristic of Romm's style in 1937, though we know that Eisenstein was experimenting with such shots at the time. The most precise operation has been performed on the final shot, where Stalin has simply vanished. The film now ends with that same image of Lenin, right hand raised, while behind him two Baltic sailors stand under the revolutionary banner, with an empty space where

Stalin once stood. Naturally, parts of the soundtrack have also been remade to eliminate almost all the frequent references to Stalin in the dialogue.

As a depiction of the events of October 1917, the new prints of *Lenin in October* are probably more accurate than the 1937 film—but this time it is the history of cinema which has been rewritten and falsified. We must assume that such films as *The Vyborg Side* and *Lenin in 1918* have been similarly re-edited, while later Stalin vehicles such as *The Vow*, *The Battle of Stalingrad* and *The Fall of*

Berlin must have disappeared completely, hidden away in the vaults until the moment when history must be rewritten again.

The day after I showed the new print of *Lenin in October*, my class saw *Volga-Volga* and I was happy to see that the big white steamer sailing down the river was still named the *Joseph Stalin*. But then I thought, this is surely an old print. If you get a new print from the Russian embassy, you may find that the steamboat, like the city of Stalin, has been rechristened *Volga*. ■

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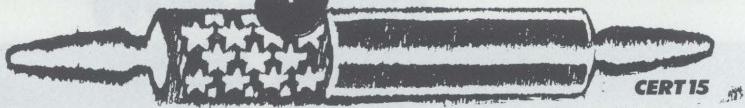


The final image of *Lenin in October*.

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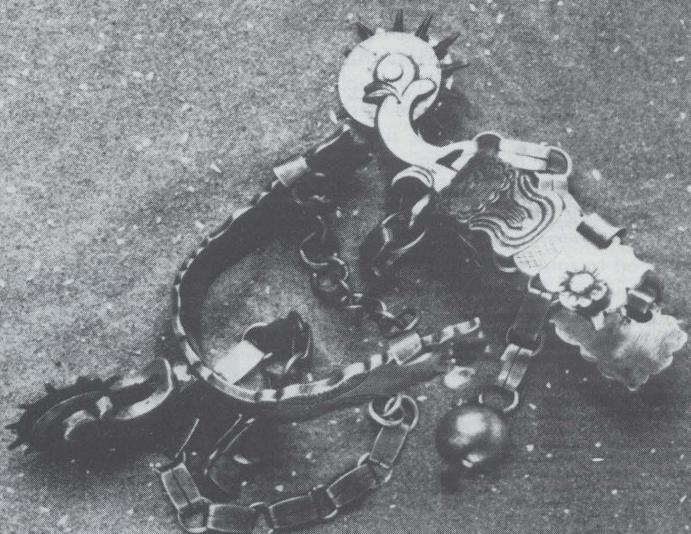
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FILM REVIEWS

All the following, except
the last two, were
showcased at the 1983
London Film Festival.

A Bout de Souffle

Prénom Carmen

Tom Milne

Prénom Carmen (Artificial Eye) is the *Pierrot le Fou* of Godard's second... what's the word? ... his *deuxième souffle*. After the return to the primitively exact analytics of stop motion in *Sauve qui peut*, the despairing acknowledgment in *Passion* that the science of lighting is hard put to it to match the creativity of the painter's eye. And out of that despair, in *Prénom Carmen*, another season in hell, and a film that spirals out of control because the film-maker, outcast from the studios and manipulated by the money-men, has retreated to a lunatic asylum from which he is constantly threatened with expulsion, diagnosed as sane by an archaically spade-bearded doctor as loony-looking as a character out of Feuillade.

Or out of Lang's *Mabuse*, perhaps, since we are introduced to the film-maker (played by Godard himself) at the beginning of the film, maniacally pacing his asylum cell and hitting out with frustrated fist at walls, objects, parts of his own anatomy, a typewriter which spells out, amid a meaningless jumble of signs and symbols, the two words 'mal vu'. Later, a cheery nurse finds the message amplified to four words: 'mal vu, mal dit'. 'You worked hard today,' she chirps encouragingly, bundling him off to bed and putting out the light, leaving him to brood on the bad news those four words represent for a film-maker. Badly visualised, badly expressed. And sitting in the dark, a sinister silhouette recalling Dr Mabuse, another madman who tried to dominate the world by probing the secret of its mysteries, the puzzled film-maker breathes one more word: *être*... 'being'.

As though a plot had been conjured by the non-sequiturs of other inmates at the asylum—one humming a snatch of Bizet, another raving about having to banish ignorance and crime by sowing evil at random—we then find ourselves plunged into a sort of comic strip retelling of the story of Carmen and Don José. Carmen (Maruschka Detmers) is the film-maker's niece, tempting to identify as a Karina surrogate since she was once so beloved by him that he wanted her to be in all his films. She wouldn't play ball, and now having other fish to fry, cajoles him into the loan of his villa by the sea, his

camera, and indeed his life, since he is conned into believing that he is to direct a film made by Carmen and her mysterious friends. Actually she has read (in a comic strip) that Dillinger once got away with a robbery by pretending to be making a film. In this day and age of ubiquitous video, she reasons, it will be even easier to use the same trick to get away with a bank robbery and a kidnapping.

At which point, an interjection. This is Godard's most playful movie in years. Quite like old times, in fact, what with proliferating movie references, alienating Brecht jokes ('Yes, it will create some dialogue,' says the film-maker when his niece asks if he wants to know why she came to see him in his retreat), and above all the note of healthy self-mockery. Entering a café quoting Mao with the glazed *déjà vu* of the ancient mariner, the film-maker laconically confides: 'Of course Mao's out these days, yet he was a great cook. After all, he fed all China.'

So it is hardly surprising that the story of Carmen and Joseph (Jacques Bonaffé) is a joke—or rather, starts and ends as one—elaborated under the dual aegis of the film-maker (who, talking to his 'producer', said 'I hope your documentary will be fiction') and the madman who inspired the theme with his talk of random violence (who said 'It's time your madness saw the other side of things'). Through the looking-glass we duly go for a bank robbery which starts with a girl asking the gendarme on duty for his autograph ('Aren't you Jean Gabin?'), continues with a disembodied voice hawking video cassettes, assorted onlookers cowering in terror or indifferently continuing to read their newspapers, and a cleaning-lady delicately mopping up the blood while leaving the bodies undisturbed. One moment of truth, perhaps,

when the disarmed gendarme Joseph tackles a Carmen whose gun is empty, and their struggle as they fall to the floor becomes an embrace echoing the helpless, oblivious passion of the couple writhing in the mud in *L'Age d'Or*.

Amour fou blossoms, immediately blighted as Carmen sulkily withdraws, momentarily melts again, humbly temporises. Never has Godard seemed quite so like Bresson as in the close-ups of Carmen hesitating, remembering, lowering her eyes in shame, looking wonderingly over her shoulder as Joseph hovers, frantic but apologetic, in uncomprehending pain. What Godard has done here is in effect to strip the story of love and jealousy between Carmen and Joseph to basics. Literally in one sense, as the two jay-naked characters stare at each other, pawing and reaching but always prevented from the ecstasy of coupling by fear, jealousy, boredom or sheer cussedness. Metaphorically in another as Joseph zeroes despairingly in on Carmen's accessible yet unavailable pudendum, murmuring 'Now I know why they call prison "the hole"'; and as Carmen stares grimly back, asking 'Why do men exist?' The despair, the *romantic* despair, is as overwhelming as it was in *Pierrot le Fou*, since what we have here is simply the state of *being*, irreducible and unalterable, that Carmen wonders about when she asks what comes before one's name (not the first name, she insists, before one has a name at all). No wonder the film-maker trying to express this, reduced to expressing this with the imperfect means of communication at his disposal, feels as insane as Pierrot did when he painted his face blue, bundled his head in dynamite and lit the fuse.

Yet in the midst of all this negation there is life, there is harmony and there is eternity, expressed respectively by the



Prénom Carmen: Jean-Luc Godard, with cigar and movie tradepaper.

punctuating shots of nocturnal cityscapes (Coutard's camerawork is, as ever, impeccable), of the Quatuor Prat rehearsing a series of Beethoven string quartets (and used as a guide to definitions of tone and mood, a little like the reconstructed paintings in *Passion*), and of the sea (placid or raging, but always immutable). For once Godard has made a film which has a beginning, a middle and an

end, in that order. Crazy, mixed-up and despondent of auteurist efforts, perhaps, but while good-humouredly acknowledging that ideological tracts are out and taking a sideswipe at the *jeunesse* of today, *Prénom Carmen* firmly inhabits the shrinking horizons left by the encroachments of video. Not for nothing does the envoi read: In Memoriam Small Movies. □

matically innovative. But then, anger has not really been a part of Truffaut's work since *Les Quatre Cents Coups*, and his major stylistic achievement—and arguably his greatest influence on subsequent cinema—has always been verve.

Vivement Dimanche! has lots of verve: a verve in storytelling (the discovery that the sound of trumpets heard on a crucial phone call comes from the Nice trotting track), a verve in construction (the cut from Fanny Ardant's entrance line in the awful amateur Victor Hugo play in which she is involved—'La voilà! Elle arrive!'—to Ardant speeding south, still in Victor Hugo costume, in her ex-husband's car), and a verve in the delighted exploitation of secondary details, like the opaque glass window through which Jean-Louis Trintignant, hiding in a storeroom, morosely watches female ankles pass by in the freedom of the street.

True, much of the energy which characterised the work of the young Truffaut has turned to stylistic devices, almost to the point of self-parody, as in the opening sequence in which a young man tries to pick up Fanny Ardant on the street, but good-naturedly accepts that she is going the other way. On the other hand, one can be grateful that the semi-comic, semi-tragic pursuit of the magic woman which has dogged many of the more recent films has here been reduced to its proper status of McGuffin. Trapped in the phone box at the end, Philippe Laudenbach reveals he did it all for women, but the confession, which has been central to earlier works, here registers about as much as the microfilm in the statuette in *North by Northwest*.

The parallels with Hitchcock films are inevitable, explicitly encouraged by Truffaut himself. And, at the risk of offending one of cinema criticism's most unquestionable canons, I would say he brings it all off rather better than the master in his recently re-released foray into similar territory with *The Trouble with Harry*. What Hitchcock rather archly does for small-town America there, Truffaut lovingly does for small-town France, artificialised here according to a set of rules as specifically French as those which govern the Hitchcock film are undoubtedly American, with that fascination for the very ordinary eccentric—the diminutive, elderly gentleman who runs the Marseilles detective agency—and the idiosyncratically obsessive behaviour of his more central characters. In a curious kind of way, the film seems to be as much a *hommage* to a certain kind of French cinema—Autant-Lara's *La Traversée de Paris*, perhaps—as to Hitchcock. Above all, though, it remains a doodle, some of its figures skilfully suggestive, others merely decorative, some undoubtedly botched. But for all that, it is Truffaut's most entertaining and watchable film since *Day for Night*—which, come to think of it, was also taken to task for being neither angry nor innovative. Who'd be a battle cry? □



Vivement Dimanche!: Fanny Ardant and Jean-Louis Trintignant.

Doodling

Vivement Dimanche!

Nick Roddick

It is in the nature of wheels to turn full circle. Two years after attacking the Cannes jury as 'a pack of incompetents who doze through the afternoon session,' François Truffaut was up there accepting the director's prize from them for *Les Quatre Cents Coups*. Not far short of thirty years (wheels, after all, come in different sizes) after a consistent series of attacks on *le cinéma de papa* for producing commercially successful but unambitious films which accustomed the public to 'gilded insignificance', Truffaut now finds himself attacked for much the same. *Vivement Dimanche!* (Artificial Eye) is a commercial success (it has outstripped all his previous movies at the Paris box office), and it could be—indeed has been—accused of both lack of ambition and gilded insignificance. It pretends to be no more than a slick comedy thriller and its main aim is to please. François Truffaut seems to have lapsed comfortably into cinematic fatherhood (not to say *papadom*), where enthusiastic comments about the performances and the glistening surfaces of Nestor Almendros' cinematography are all.

The French have for some time been conducting their own cinematic battles around Truffaut, but his lapse appears to have come as a special shock in the curious, post-Leavisite world of British

film criticism. Of all movements in modern cinema, the French New Wave seems to be the one we are least prepared to allow to take it easy. It is far too well established as the standard bearer for a certain kind of cinema—one which did all those things experimental cinema was supposed to do (like being formally innovative and engage with questions of social and sexual significance) while remaining watchable and above all of a certain quality. That made it a sort of alternative *cinéma de papa*, in which the educated critic could find identity and, with it, comfort. It was an easy world in which to be angry, since the important issues with which it dealt were set apart from the social problems of our own environment. The identity and development of the individual director became lost beneath an image of the *Cahiers* cinéaste, forever young, a hand-held camera in his fist.

Well, those days are gone. Not only has the wheel come full circle, but the idea of a *caméra stylo*—a cinema of personal expression—has asserted itself with a vengeance. One of the prime functions of the ballpoint, after all, is to doodle. And that, precisely, is what *Vivement Dimanche!* is: a masterly doodle, executed with love, skill and flourish. It is a complicated thriller about a man falsely accused of murder in the best *Wrong Man* tradition, who is caught up in a chain of events so apparently relentless that it seems as though his innocence can never be established. There is no anger to be found in it, unless one counts as anger a harsh glance at the things men and women will do for money (and men for women), and very little that is cine-

Dole life *Meantime/John Pym*

How can the reality of a lifetime of enforced leisure, a lifetime on the dole, a lifetime spent accepting week by week the charity of an indifferent nation, be brought home to those of us fortunate enough to be in work, in Britain, on New Year's Day 1984? Mike Leigh, a perceptive analyst of human subterfuge, of the games we play to avoid our responsibilities, addresses the subject. In *Meantime* (Central Television), his latest 'devising', he seizes the audience by the lapels and delivers the sort of ferocious head-butt which one of his characters, the East End skinhead Coxy, seems forever on the point of administering to every immovable object which comes his way.



Meantime: Colin (Tim Roth).

The Pollocks—defeated Frank, the father; ferretlike Mark, the older son; and slow Colin, his brother, called 'Muppet'—live out their unchanging workless days on a Chigwell housing estate. Nothing happens: rubbish blows across the neglected lawns, slouching fatigue overcomes all but the most hardy. Mavis Pollock, the wife and mother, a sort of Dandy Nichols without the caricatured music hall charm, scowls at her useless menfolk, sullenly ministers to their needs. She escapes to the bingo palace, but even there things go wrong: her handbag is full of ballpoint pens which won't, at the crucial moment, write.

Elsewhere, on some alien planet, at the other end of the Central Line, lives Mavis' sister Barbara, who years ago took herself in hand, learnt secretarial skills, spruced herself up, married the obtuse John Lane, obtained a middle-class sufficiency. But Barbara has no children: she takes pity on the gormless Colin, with his twitch, his skew-whiff, taped-up

specs, seduces him away from Chigwell with the offer of a token job, makes great play over the hours he must keep, seems to be giving him a start. Charity, Mark knows, is hard enough to take from the servants of the Crown, let alone from one's own family ... Matters come to a head.

The Pollocks and the Lanes are observed disinterestedly, some would say with a cruel disinterest. They are in many ways, like most of Mike Leigh's characters, an appalling shower. But spend time with them (and as usual their lives, their litanies of woe, have a mesmeric power) and one begins to discern the authentic lineaments of their humanity. The squabbling which marks every waking minute of the Pollocks' lives is a sign that they are still alive: a couple of rounds in the gym, a tonic to keep them on their toes.

Barbara, repressed, chattering Barbara, shooing poor suetlike Mavis out of her immaculate kitchen, has a wholly unexpected streak of firmness in her character. She holds her own with notable good sense when arguing with the council's Zen housing officer who comes to inspect the Pollocks' defective windows but who instead offers a tendentious lecture on grains of sand which should not be allowed to grow into heaps, the moral of which escapes the uncharacteristically silent Frank and Mavis. She may have offered Colin charity, have lacked the sense to realise the hurt she caused or the insight to see why she made the offer in the first place, but she nevertheless likes Colin, is patient with him, can ruffle his hair with genuine affection.

Meantime is at times painfully funny. But one has the feeling that Mike Leigh has not pulled the throttle all the way out: the mockery is more muted than on occasions in the past. From time to time, however, he and his faultless ensemble (Marion Bailey, Phil Daniels, Tim Roth, Pam Ferris, Jeff Robert, Gary Oldman) go all out: there is, for example, one marvellously choreographed scene, in which the Pollocks crisscross the screen with farcical precision in an attempt to extract Colin from the bathroom, which is infused with pure good humour. Mike Leigh and his photographer Roger Pratt focus one's attention with compelling ease: the skinhead rolling in a barrel, thumping the sides in manic desperation; Hayley, the object of Colin's affection, so shy that she seems intent on shrivelling up every time one sees her; Frank and Mark Pollock drawing their money with twisted, feverish contempt.

In the end, Colin negotiates the Central Line and somehow stumbles his way to Aunt Barbara's house (a bedroom is to be redecorated, the equipment has been laid out in apple-pie order), but Mark beats him to it and after a tug-of-war with Barbara persuades Colin not to take the job. Barbara is one of those controlled heroines whom Mike Leigh delights in

testing to the limit until they snap with dramatic effect. In this case, after the boys' departure, Barbara hits the bottle and gives herself over to inconclusive tears: John, needless to say, is baffled. This however, is not the heart of the matter.

Colin finds his way back to Chigwell, swathed in a parka, hood up. There is a row to end all rows. Why on earth did he turn down the job? Mark half-defiantly confesses his devilish role. The storm rages, Colin remains sunk in silence on the bed. And then, in an unprecedented show of animation, he yells at his thunderstruck parents to leave his room. He goes to bed still in the jacket. Next morning, an awe-struck Mark cautiously pushes back the hood; the brothers regard each other; Mark extends a hand and reverently caresses his brother's shaven dome. The haircut is a first sign of independence, cost £1.20, a peculiar act of half-understood defiance. This is no longer the myopic Muppet Kermit but the dauntless 'Kojak'. The bleak landscape is lit up by a moment of optimism. □

Snafu!

*Saigon—
Year of the Cat*

Jill Forbes

When the last bastion against communism was threatened and the thin red line could no longer hold against the barbarians, when the Americans were forced to yield by a peasant army whose main weapon was its fanaticism, one might have thought they would have prepared to go. But snafu! People had reckoned without the pride of an Ambassador who, having failed to get the Vietcong to negotiate with him when he still retained some strength, somehow convinced himself they wanted to do so when he was weak. The Americans were an unconscionably long time leaving Vietnam and, when they did, nothing so ill became them as the departing of it. Given a mere twenty-four hours to get out, they simply scuttled and in the process betrayed thousands of Vietnamese employees, sympathisers and informers to whom they had promised safe passage and a home elsewhere.

The author of *Saigon—Year of the Cat* (Thames Television), David Hare, has a predilection for post-colonialism. In plays like *Map of the World* and *Plenty* he has skilfully dissected the betrayals which follow the fall of empire. It is Hare's gloomy view that things could not be otherwise, and though Vietnam was probably the most vicious colonial war there has ever been, the most cruel, arbitrary and iniquitous, it was only one in a long line of inevitable sell-outs. The whole offence, all the events of the low dis-

honest decade which culminated in 1975, were prefigured in *Columbus*.

If Hare often finds it necessary to get outside the domestic scene to achieve some perspective on post-imperial Britain, Stephen Frears the director may have had slightly different reasons for having been attracted to this subject. Frears is on record as wanting to direct a thriller and having failed in the attempt in his first feature, *Gumshoe*. The problem is summed up by the fact that, as Frears puts it, 'in English films policemen wear silly helmets.' Thus the shift to a Vietnam where policemen wore combat fatigues may have been a kind of insurance against this film failing to take itself seriously and turning into a comic fantasy in the manner of *Gumshoe*.

What Frears was clearly looking for was the hard edge of *film noir*, the kind of thing, indeed, his producer Verity Lambert often achieves in her TV series like *Minder*. But in these days of Hollywood hype, it is a brave person who makes a small film about Vietnam. Frears and Hare have tackled this problem by a matter of fact approach to character and *mise en scène* and the deliberate avoidance of the conventions of *China Gate* or *Macao*. None of the Vietnamese is obviously inscrutable, none of the sets looks like a cardboard Chinatown, while the locations are only imperceptibly Oriental. The central characters, on the other hand, are revamped clichés from Sam Fuller or E. M. Forster. Bob Chesneau is a Cold War warrior with a conscience who, physically and in every other way, seems to have walked straight off the set of a 50s B-feature, while Judi Dench's Barbara Dean is the equally conventional spinster expatriate with an elderly mother back in Bournemouth.

The opening scenes in which Barbara explains (voice-over) that she has always been extremely secretive suggest that an

earlier version of the script may have developed the character more fully. What actually happens is that she has an affair with Chesneau, breaks with him because she disapproves of the way the Americans are handling the war, but calls on him at the last minute when her reluctance to leave the country she has grown to love means that she can only escape with help from the Embassy. Chesneau, meanwhile, learns from his Vietnamese contacts that the Vietcong intend to push right into Saigon, but fails to carry any of the arguments with his CIA colleagues and Embassy superiors who treat his demands that they prepare to plan an evacuation as 'hysterical'. But he omits to destroy his own files, perhaps because he is too busy helping Barbara Dean, and in the undignified scramble to depart he, too, betrays those who have helped him.

As always, the personal impinges on the political even if, in this film, it is hardly more than the obligatory 'romantic interest'. But in a sense it does not matter that the relationship between the two principals is both predictable and low key since their self-absorption is simply a mirror of the political stance of the Americans in Saigon. The multi-storey American Embassy is nothing but a giant bunker, a sterile area designed for the free consumption of Coca-Cola, in which a debate in Congress matters more than the enemy at the gates. With defeat, the whole show is simply shipped to the Philippines to await further confrontations.

Thus *Saigon—Year of the Cat* develops into a horribly gripping suspense story. The audience is held in a kind of appalled fascination with the mechanics of departure, on tenterhooks to know whether the last GI will make it in time. But as the soldiers leave, bolting the doors behind them as they dash for the

final helicopter on the roof, the hordes that overrun the building are not—or not yet—the Vietcong, but the betrayed, all those whose noses were pressed against the panes of capitalism and who believed, right up until the last moment, that the next helicopter out was theirs. It is sickening to contemplate and, as Barbara Dean puts it, an appalling waste.

Saigon—Year of the Cat is a not altogether successful film since it is weak on characterisation and the narrative appears to promise more than it delivers, but in one respect at least Stephen Frears has scored a notable success in terms of his declared ambitions. He has avoided the twin pitfalls of benign comedy and television documentary: this does not look very much like an English film and it seems that that was much of the point. □

Out of the lion's den

Daniel/Richard Combs

For two reasons it is not surprising to find that *Daniel* (Fox) has included an impressive amount of *The Book of Daniel*, E. L. Doctorow's multi-faceted, multi-voiced rendering of the Rosenberg 'atom spy' trial. One is the way director Sidney Lumet's much maligned penchant for the theatrical often mutates into a unique talent for the novelistic—mosaic movies which don't simply multiply but divide their characters, incorporating diverse attitudes towards them that add up to something more complex but reputedly less filmic than the moveable feast of, say, *Nashville*. The second is that Doctorow has imposed himself on the film not just as screenwriter but as executive producer (with Lumet). What is surprising, however, is that *Daniel* should then choose to break its subject down by flooding all the scenes to do with its Rosenberg figures, the Isaacsons, in a filtered orange glow, while all the framing material to do with the two Isaacson children, their psychological and political inheritance, has been shot in workaday, present-day (actually late 60s) colour.

This crude method of signalling the 'past' sets it off visually as not just history but a kind of prehistory, one already embalmed in amber, as it were, or encased in a text turning yellow with age. As a device, it would seem to contradict what is one of the central tenets of Doctorow's novel, a version of Forster's 'only connect'. This works out to be less the book's thesis than its passion and, ultimately, its sense of frustration. Commenting on his parents' trial in the early 50s for having passed atom secrets to the Russians, Daniel is angered most that everyone, including his parents' counsel, accepted the judicial context (i.e., that



Saigon—Year of the Cat: Barbara Dean (Judi Dench), centre.

FILM REVIEWS



Daniel: Paul (Mandy Patinkin) and his children (Jena Greco, Ilan M. Mitchell-Smith).

some crime had been committed by somebody). He concludes: 'I am beginning to be intolerant of reformers ... I am beginning to be nauseated by men of good will. We are dealing here with a failure to make connections. The failure to make connections is complicity. Reform is complicity.' But a little earlier, he has observed: 'The radical discovers connections between available data and the root responsibility. Finally he connects everything ... Nothing is left outside the connections. At this point society becomes bored with the radical. Finally connected in his characterisation it has achieved the counter-insurgent rationale that allows it to destroy him. The radical is given the occasion for one last discovery—the connection between society and his death.'

Racked between these two perceptions, *The Book of Daniel* does not so much make out the case for the Rosenbergs/Isaacsons as it poses them as a case of the collective, collaborative delusion in which any individual is enlisted by his society ('The final existential condition is citizenship. Every man is the enemy of his own country ... All societies are armed societies. All citizens are soldiers. All governments stand ready to commit their citizens to death in the interest of their government'). It is a work of radical pessimism whose strength is its texture, a structure of ideas and a mood rather than a political case history in the conventional sense. It is also not a narrative in the conventional sense—and to their

credit Lumet and Doctorow have preserved the fragmentation, the multiplicity of voices (Daniel now recites direct to camera Doctorow's interpolated history lessons on capital punishment as an instrument of class warfare). To an extent, though, they have been forced to pretend that there is a narrative basis, hence the stylisation of the past not only as something separate from the present but as a discrete area of investigation. Daniel (Timothy Hutton), a rootless angry young man in the late 60s, a rebel without a cause at a time when causes are all too ready to hand, now seems something of a *film noir* hero, a man who must unlock a secret in the past (the question of what his parents did or didn't do that resulted in their being executed as traitors) before his 'memory'—or, in this case, psychological wholeness—can be restored.

The trouble with the drift of the film in this direction is that the material with Daniel and his even more traumatised sister Susan (Amanda Plummer) works as a kind of political psychodrama—they are the most obvious casualties, as it were, of the depth charges set off in the national consciousness by the McCarthyite terror—but it doesn't supply the film with much narrative energy. Only late in the day does Daniel's rushing hither and yon suggest that he is actually involved in a quest for the truth. Each tiny scene with one more witness to or commentator on his parents' tragedy (their lawyer's widow, who believes that

they were guilty at least of allowing themselves to be used by others; the journalist who pooh-poohs the atom secrets charge but believes there is no smoke without some fire) conforms to the texture of Doctorow's novel. But it doesn't answer the need which the film has created for itself: a resolution of character through drama; a satisfactory definition, at least, of the central mystery which will allow the protagonist to learn and move on.

If this need does not exist in the novel it is because characters in a way don't exist. The book is full of vividly described landscapes and social history, largely reproduced in the film—the Bronx neighbourhood where the children grow up; the intense but contrasting involvement (his theoretical, hers pragmatic) of the parents, Paul (Mandy Patinkin) and Rochelle (Lindsay Crouse), in the populist movements and Communist (or Stalinist) sympathies of the day. But Daniel is more the consciousness of the book—he in fact is supposed to be writing it, as a form of therapy, instead of writing his graduate thesis—than its hero. And Susan, who has attempted suicide at the beginning of the story and dies at the end, is even less a character; she is the most brilliant but damaged fragment of that consciousness. Having used Daniel as both map and lightning rod in this intellectual history, Doctorow is free to write him out in similar terms at the end, in fact with the self-conscious literary flourish of 'three endings'. The film finds itself stuck with a different rhetoric: Daniel vindicating himself as a character, and the martyrdom of his parents, by taking up the banners of the anti-Vietnam movement.

The most disconcerting thing about the bifurcated structure of the film is that what visually is its anchoring, sharp-focused half—the trauma of Daniel and his sister and their attempt to find a cure—actually seems to have little purchase and little justification, beyond some finely acted scenes in the politics of family, sibling rivalry and identity crisis. It is in the orange-doused scenes of the past that *Daniel* develops real sharpness, and where the atomising, *Prince of the City* side of Lumet comes to the fore. Beginning with the easily assumed innocence and commendable politics of the Isaacsons, the film proceeds to strip away the mystery of how they came to be put on trial and then executed on a flagrantly bogus charge in terms of an ethos to which they had also contributed. In unconscious collusion with a repressive Establishment, the Isaacsons, and/or their party, had sought martyrs as eagerly as the FBI had sought scapegoats. These are matters which, fascinatingly, have found their way from the 'book' of Daniel into the film. They are compromised only when the latter chooses to impose that narrower, psychological focus which its own contracted form of the title suggests. □

Change partners

Can She Bake a Cherry Pie?

John Pym

Zee, whose husband has just walked out, circles the Central Park statue of Alice and her friends: like the White Queen, she is in a dither. The camera passes a ragtaggle combo which launches with relaxed tone-setting ease into the old song from which Henry Jaglom's new film takes its title. One look at Zee, however, at her deshabille and her unpinned hair, tells us that Billy Boy's mother would have had a fit if her son had brought this girl home. Without more ado (and it's worth drawing attention to this modest opening since these days few films assert themselves with such speed or authority), we find ourselves in that New York City from which Jaglom and his friends set off at the start of *Sitting Ducks* on a hairbrained quest for happiness.

In *Sitting Ducks*, Michael Emil and Zack Norman played conmen headed in a capacious limo for Miami Beach, on the run from some vexed members of the Mob. If, like Jason Staebler of *The King of Marvin Gardens*, they could only get to their island in the sun, then all the troubles of the world might, it seemed, fade away like the end of some tiresome and complicated dream. A patent absurdity, of course, but such was the force of their conviction, so vivid and unworkaday, that we are inclined for a moment to entertain it. *Can She Bake a Cherry Pie?* (Virgin), which remains grounded in New York, is more contained than Jaglom's previous feature, its matter less inclined to fly off into spirals of absurdity. Nevertheless, its principals are similarly immensely attractive dreamers.

Zee, played by Karen Black (an actress who has made distraught vulnerability her own), comes to rest in a café, where after much fretful indecision she orders some chocolatey items. Seated at the next table is Eli, Michael Emil (a formidably talkative character player: his chief subject being himself, the state of the inner and outer man), who is lecturing a sadsack office colleague on how a change in attitude will help him to endure relationships with girls. Zee looks so mournful, is about to ingest such harmful food, that Eli is compelled to abandon his friend, who with many a pensive tug fails to win back his attention, to comfort her. It is a wholly individual comic moment, modern, expertly built. But at the same time one is reminded of the long tradition of 'meeting cute' from which it stems. As in the Hollywood comedies of fifty years ago, such is Jaglom's command of his material, it does not cross one's mind to enquire how in the coming minutes the hero can afford

to spend so much time loafing in cafés. The characters only have eyes for each other, and we only have eyes for them.

Looked at from one point of view, and especially by those indisposed to roll with the characters, to slip down the rabbit hole, *Can She Bake a Cherry Pie?* might seem a lightly insubstantial confection. The story follows the patient Eli as he woos Zee, a singer, and after a climactic upset wins her as completely as Fred—whom our couple watch in *The Band Wagon*—ever won Ginger. However, looked at from another, it offers as rich a feast as *Sitting Ducks*, and perhaps a more concentrated one. The manner in which Eli lays siege and she surrenders is full of artful jigs and feints, the whole both held together, deepened and made absurdly funny by Jaglom's deployment of punctuating home movies of himself and his brother Michael Emil, in the certain days of childhood, songs, and the appearance of the grizzled magician Orson Welles attempting to effect the disappearance of some large placid animals. To detail this circuitous romance, however, which ends wholly unsentimentally with a reaffirmation of the old virtues, is most definitely to spoil the fun. Suffice to say that it survives despite Eli's dogged monitoring of his bodily rhythms, a scientific experiment to prove that he loves Zee more than he has loved anyone before.

Jaglom gives the film added texture, makes it less 'definable', by putting up against his valiantly unmiddle-aged couple a licentious young pigeon-fancier, a street performer to whom all women like his compliant bird seem in thrall. If Zee and Eli are something of a latter-day screwball couple, Larry, this soft-hatted young man with an unpleasant line in self-absorption, who seats himself beside them at a café table, is a creature from the 60s—he might indeed, to follow a Jaglom line of free association, have been a hanger-on at Alice's Restaurant. It is to

Jaglom's credit that this collision of types in a dream-sealed corner of New York seems the most natural of meetings. Larry's would-be seduction of Zee leads with a schematic old-fashioned flourish to her realisation that she is not crazy, is no longer tied to her husband, is now ready to dedicate herself to Eli and to motherhood. Eli, by this time, is quite old enough to leave his mother; and should this absent figure, whom we have glimpsed in the home movies, still be around, one could imagine her, in the end, casting a halfway approving eye over her son's beloved. □

Closed circuit

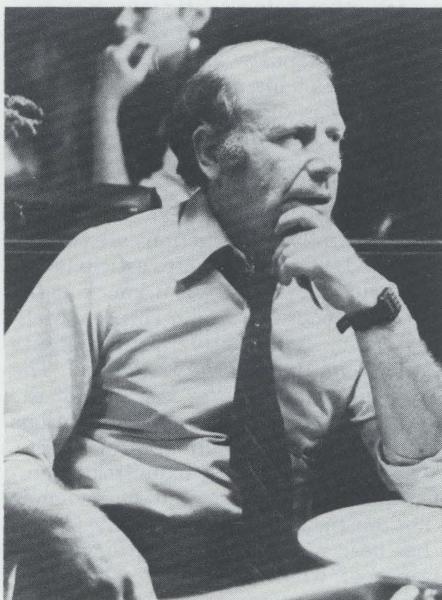
The Osterman Weekend

Tom Milne

Who needs another conspiracy thriller illustrating the Great American paranoia that has been proliferating on screen ever since Watergate? Exception might perhaps be made for *The Osterman Weekend* (Fox) in that it has been guided with such skill along the assembly line by Sam Peckinpah that it emerges like one of those bright, amazingly compact, ingeniously functional artefacts of modern Japanese technology. Peckinpah, though, hasn't made a movie in the five years since *Convoy*, and it soon becomes apparent that he is on his best behaviour, suppressing not only the explosions of violence that gave him a bad name, but more idiosyncratic quirks which gave him a good one.

Based on a novel by Robert Ludlum, the film centres on a CIA agent called Fassett (John Hurt), and taking its cue from the sound of his name, proceeds to explore facets of reality. Even as the credits unfold, we are watching a video which records the assassination by KGB agents of a woman who turns out to be Fassett's wife. 'Nasty piece of film,' comments CIA chief Maxwell Danforth (Burt Lancaster) as distastefully as though he were watching some grubby snuff movie (which indeed he is), noting that for unspecified reasons the CIA had been obliged to connive at the assassination, with the unforeseen bonus that Fassett's redoubled anti-Communist zeal has led him to uncover the existence of a Soviet spy ring called Omega.

Since the three suspected American members of Omega are all close friends of John Tanner (Rutger Hauer)—hard-hitting host of the TV interview show 'Face to Face', known as a zealous patriot whose loyalty is beyond question—Fassett's plan, given Danforth's blessing, is to secure Tanner's cooperation in exposing Omega's un-American network. A meeting is therefore set up in one of those vast, echoing warehouses reached by freight elevator with an armed guard ominously glimpsed beyond the gates on



Eli (Michael Emil).

each floor, and so delightfully photogenic as secret cloak-and-dagger headquarters.

So a viciously circular game of cat-and-mouse is set up, with cat after mouse and cat after cat, and the facets literally multiplying during 'the Osterman weekend', a periodic reunion for Tanner, his traitor-friends from college days, and their wives. Tanner's task during the weekend is to sow tension and hope someone's nerve will crack. Fassett, having plugged every nook and cranny in the house with surveillance equipment, helps out by making suggestive modifications to TV programmes, relaying instructions by closed circuit, and in general creating the nerve-racking sensation that everybody is watching everybody else. The only result (aside from a small but nasty massacre) is to uncover another facet of reality for Tanner: the way in which 'documentary evidence' has been

manipulated to create an altogether spurious identity for Omega. Whereupon Tanner enters the facet game himself, pre-recording part of his TV show so that neither Fassett nor Danforth realises he isn't where he should be, only his image.

Peckinpah, obviously neither involved nor much interested in what was little more than a commercial chore, plays the game as faithfully as he did in *The Killer Elite*, giving only a slightly sardonic edge to the few lightly quirky moments that survive in Alan Sharp's equally self-effacing script: Tanner's mocking first encounter with Danforth in the movie-land secret HQ ('I'm cloak,' he says, 'you must be dagger'); a surveillance scene where one of the suspects unexpectedly intrudes and Fassett, having failed to switch himself out of the closed circuit in time, labours through an impromptu performance as a TV weather forecaster; a

moment when all the sophisticated technology proves inadequate and Tanner, in best *Boy's Own* manner, has to hold up a warning chalked on a bit of cardboard.

But the trouble about playing this sort of conspiracy game, in which everyone eyes everyone else with triplecross following on doublecross and back again, is that it becomes difficult to avoid that perspective on reality so neatly defined by Harry Lime when he took Holly Martins up to the top of the Prater wheel in *The Third Man*, pointed to his potential victims far below, and asked: 'Would you really feel any pity if one of those dots stopped moving for ever?' Here, mercilessly squeezed by a python-like plot and reduced in any case to reflections of reflections, the characters simply don't exist. Ultimately, one has no option but to agree when Fassett says, 'All this activity ... and for nothing.' □

Poet's blood

The Colour of Pomegranates

Gilbert Adair

If ever film were poem, it is *The Colour of Pomegranates* (Artificial Eye). Barthes, in *S/Z*, coined an ingenious phrase for those devices of suspense and postponement by which the author, or rather the text itself, holds the reader in seductive, Scheherezadesque thrall: he called them a narrative's 'sense of preservation'. Following Barthes, one is tempted to call the narrative of Paradjanov's film literally *suicidal*. Though, as it is ostensibly a 'life' of the Armenian poet Arutiun Sayadian (1712-1795), it takes its structure from the most conventional of narrative modes, historical chronology, a formal constraint further refined by its being divided into a prologue, eight chapters and an epilogue, it has, as a purely filmic entity, 'nowhere to go'. It lacks, in short, a force of gravity, and it is that same gravity which is absent from many of its component shots, icons of an incomparably ethereal grace, in which individual figures, whether singing, dancing, swaying or just staring at the camera, are seldom positioned on the 'ground floor', so to speak, of the frame but perch upon ladders, rooftops, etc.

Nor does any shot succeed its fore-runner in simple accordance with the precepts of classical (or modern) montage. They are, instead, laid out before our eyes like so many Tarot cards, and in such a way that, were it not for the biographical continuity underpinning the film, they could quite conceivably be reshuffled and redealt at random to produce a different but no less viable fiction (as with the Tarot-inspired tales in Calvino's *The Castle of Crossed Destinies*). Or, to switch metaphors (and, in view of



The Colour of Pomegranates.

the extreme hermeticism of its socio-historical referents, the film may most fruitfully be approached by a Westerner as a marvellous *machine à métaphores*), its images seem suspended in time, hung on the screen as in a gallery, their relation to each other being contiguous, not continuous. One's scrutiny of them is totally 'free', vertiginously 'open'; it is not a guided tour of his protagonist's life that Paradjanov is offering us; consequently, in spite of its wilful archaism, not to mention its almost nerve-racking visual beauty, *The Colour of Pomegranates* becomes a crucial video text.

Syntactically, prose fictions are fuelled, lubricated, by the indefinite article (at its most primary, 'There was a knock at the door. I opened it to find a corpse clutching a gun', etc), poetry by the definite article ('The Rape of the Lock', etc). *The Colour of Pomegranates* is a film of the definite article, and one of its vocations is the naming, through images, of objects. To take only the most axiomatic example, a pomegranate in Paradjanov's hands is not one picked indiscriminately; rather, it has been metamorphosed into the very essence of what one might call 'pomegranatude' (a metamorphosis which cannot, for us, exclude the fruit's decadent,

90s, Wildean connotations). But in addition to being mythologised by the definite article, it is, by some mysterious alchemical process, *capitalised*, so that, in even so 'realistic' a medium as the cinema, it manages to retain the hallucinatory quality of the Loaf of Bread and Jug of Wine in the *Rubaiyat* (the poem which, for a Westerner, this film most resembles).

It is as if we had never before seen pomegranates on the screen, or veils, masks, vases, tombstones, mandolins, icons, bells, antlers, crucifixes, statues, books, manuscripts, scrolls, scales, saddles, nipples, grapes, apples, gloves, looms, rams, loaves, lutes, daggers, towers, churches—and others too numinous to mention. To my knowledge, only one other film-maker has so utterly eradicated the patina of habit which the eye encrusts on a filmed object, and that is Cocteau: his *Le Sang d'un Poète* and *Le Testament d'Orphée* strike me, though apparently nobody else, as far the most telling references to Paradjanov.

The performances themselves, whose systematically frontal relationship to the camera is already in defiance of the codified conventions of cinematic narrative, are filmed, not as 'objects', but as sacrificial victims offered up to the camera-god. And, if you are prepared to follow me on a leap into metaphysics, I would add that this capitalisation, this 'inevitabilisation' of the visual material, extends even to the rigour with which the film has been composed. By which I mean, a shot by Paradjanov becomes The Shot, a frame The Frame. As is the case with all great works of art, there is no alternative.

(This review is intended in the main for those who will already have seen *The Colour of Pomegranates*. To anyone seeking a detailed account of the film's history and iconography, I can recommend the brilliant and exemplary study by Tony Rayns in the *Monthly Film Bulletin*, November 1983.) □

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BOOK REVIEWS

Stroheim

THE MAN YOU LOVED TO HATE: Eric von Stroheim and Hollywood
by Richard Koszarski
Oxford University Press/
£7.95 (paperback)

With the arguable exception of Welles, no film-maker is more shrouded in mystery and hyperbole than Stroheim. To undertake a major biography of such a figure entails a careful negotiation of contradictory accounts and lacunae, both bound to test the capacities of the most patient researcher. Like Welles, Stroheim cuts an outsized figure in our imaginations, endlessly complicated by the autobiographical resonances of his films and the conscious mythic role he has played in film history as archetypal exploiter/victim of Hollywood's industrial riches and bottom-line constraints.

Quite apart from the ghostly parallels between *Greed* and *The Magnificent Ambersons*—as works brutally mutilated by studio vendetta; and as obsessively detailed re-enactments of novelistic, 19th century versions of social decline following more glamorous (if equally acerbic) celebrations of wealth and power which featured the director as ascending star (*Foolish Wives*, *Citizen Kane*)—Stroheim and Welles have each suffered the fate of visionary directors who have assumed increasingly self-parodic identities as showy actors while being steadily deprived of their first vocation. Whether we see the man through the work or vice versa, it becomes progressively harder, as the stock of legends piles up, to separate one from the other.

To date, Richard Koszarski is the third Stroheim biographer—and the first to have worked (by necessity) without the co-operation of Stroheim himself. Peter Noble's *Hollywood Scapegoat* (1950), though later disclaimed by the director, owed a great deal to his participation, and Thomas Quinn Curtiss' *Von Stroheim* (1971) is an 'official' account by a close friend who had full access to Stroheim's papers. As Koszarski points out, 'Curtiss tells the story as von Stroheim himself would have told it' and his biography is thus 'quite valuable in offering the von Stroheim version as a touchstone against which all other accounts may be measured.'

Valuable indeed; but far from infallible. In his own introduction, Curtiss virtually dismisses Stroheim's mythomania and middle-class Jewish background—the latter uncovered by Denis



A Wellesian image from Stroheim's *Greed*.

Marion after the director's death in 1957—as groundless rumours of doubtful origin. Koszarski, more sensibly, begins with both as demonstrable facts and necessary prerequisites. And while one can't see *The Man You Loved to Hate* entirely supplanting Curtiss, the new biography clearly deserves space on every shelf that holds the latter. For Koszarski is the first scholar to make a serious effort at recounting Stroheim's life without privileging the authorised accounts; and the result is a fascinating compendium of fresh as well as familiar material.

For starters, we learn something about Stroheim's apparent intentions when he arrived at Ellis Island aged 24 in 1909—having left Bremen as Viennese army deserter Erich Oswald Stroheim, and materialising as Erich Oswald Hans Carl Maria von Stroheim ten days later, a Hungarian clerk. We discover harsh details of his unorthodox and sometimes violent first marriage, four years hence, to Margaret Knox, after he moved to the west coast—a union destroyed by poverty, drink and physical abuse in a manner which chillingly anticipates the deteriorating relationship between Mac and Trina in *Greed*. (The marriage certificate, we find, 'is a typical von Stroheim document,' assigning nobility to the groom's parents, identifying his profession as 'importer', and listing Knox's age as 18, about half the correct figure.) By the end of the Prologue, we know that Stroheim never learned to drive a car; his famous role as Gloria Swanson's chauffeur in *Sunset Boulevard* called for studio fakery.

None of this is to imply that Koszarski treats Stroheim unsympathetically, or imparts any flavour of sensational exposé to his carefully woven narrative. Typically, when he recounts the

extraordinary means used by Stroheim to compel an actor to laugh in *Walking Down Broadway*—tying a string round his sex organ and jerking it at the appropriate moment with the command, 'Reaction! Reaction!'—he introduces this ploy delicately by noting that Stroheim 'employed a bio-mechanical system of direction'. More generally, he tempers his overall sympathy for Stroheim in his struggles with producers by giving full due to the studios' positions in each conflict—permitting a rare look at the complexities involved in assigning ultimate blame.

Consider, for instance, the simple matter of the titles of Stroheim's first two major productions. When *The Pinnacle* was redubbed *Blind Husbands*, Stroheim took a full-page ad in a trade paper denouncing his employer for this desecration; but the following year, it was apparently Stroheim himself who approved the follow-up title *Foolish Wives*—perhaps swayed by the commercial viability of the first title. (As a grotesque postscript, one learns that the Goldwyn Company's original working title for *Greed* was *Greedy Wives*.)

In comparable fashion, one follows a pattern of attack and counterattack in the front-office battles accompanying all nine of Stroheim's features, with Koszarski dependably furnishing new evidence in each case. We discover, contrary to legend, that MGM actually netted a quarter million dollars in domestic rentals of *Greed* in the 1920s, yet failed to attract much interest in the film overseas. The disaster of *The Wedding March* in small-town America is chronicled in detail, while the loss of the sole surviving print of the film's second part (*The Honeymoon*) in a Cinémathèque fire winds up being

rationalised in characteristically mystic fashion by Henri Langlois as 'the work of von Stroheim's restless spirit'. (The fire occurred shortly after the death of Stroheim, who was reportedly mortified by this poorly edited relic of his work.)

As for *Queen Kelly*, 'It is probably true that with [Joseph P.] Kennedy eyeing Swanson, and Swanson eyeing Kennedy, nobody was keeping an eye on von Stroheim.' And it now seems that it was Stroheim's instruction to Tully Marshall to drool tobacco juice on Swanson's hand while putting on Queen Kelly's wedding ring that finally goaded Swanson into halting production on the picture.

As a detailed critical response to Stroheim's films, Koszarski's book is usually sound, but often tantalisingly incomplete. He omits any reference to the armless veteran in *Foolish Wives*, whose singular appearances comprise one of the more subtle and disquieting narrative devices in Stroheim's work. One wishes that he had further explored some of the implications of the *Greed* script—an invaluable document that conveys a good deal about the director's methods and predilections (from the removal of Norris' anti-semitism in the treatment of Zerkow to the innovative open narrative structure employed in the introductions of Marcus and Trina—which I have examined elsewhere, in Raymond Bellour's *Le Cinéma Américain* collection). But altogether, this is probably the best biographical treatment of Stroheim that we are likely to get—intelligent, judicious and a pleasure to read.

JONATHAN ROSENBAUM

Infant industry

THE RISE OF THE CINEMA IN GREAT BRITAIN
by John Barnes
Bishopsgate Press/£16.50

John Barnes' *The Rise of the Cinema in Great Britain* is the second in his planned series of five volumes covering the first six years of British cinema history. Is a study in such extreme detail justifiable? Certainly it is in terms of the achievements of British film-makers in this period. It was a time of frenzied activity in the infant industry. It culminated at the turn of the century with the discovery of montage, the intercutting of shots, in Brighton, which Georges Sadoul has called 'a brief but brilliant flash'.

Mr Barnes' opus is planned to lead up to this first, and some would say only, high point of British film history. But as he shows in the present volume, the spadework was already being done in 1897. The British at this time, unlike the French, were making few fiction films, concentrating rather on actualities. Barnes rightly warns us, 'not to neglect the actuality film in favour of the fiction film, for it is in the former that many of the innovations in film technique are to be found.' He shows that the focus for such innovation in 1897 was the filming of Queen Victoria's Jubilee. The surging crowds meant that the two dozen cameramen present had to film from on high and the long processions necessitated especially long loads of film. In addition, one operator, R. W. Paul, pioneered a panning head for his camera.

Barnes maintains that these developments, forced on filmmakers through circumstance, accustomed audiences to such things as high-angle shots, lengthier films and camera movement. The most accomplished films, technically speaking, of the time were made in France (mainly by Méliès), but the special effects in these, though very cleverly done, were essentially a dead end. It was the British who were making the more lasting contribution to the cinema.

The British photographic press in the late nineteenth century was probably the most comprehensive in the world. Barnes uses this as well as the *Era* theatrical paper and his own superb collection of books and apparatus to present a detailed picture of the emerging world of the British cinema. He has also done some legwork, managing with great glee to find the location of Alfred Darling's original camera workshop in Brighton.

The main fault of the book is inherent in a periodically published history of this kind. By arbitrarily dividing it up into year-long segments, Barnes is rather too often forced to say, 'in the previous volume of this history' or 'in a future volume'. One loses track of the sweep of a company or individual's achievement at the expense of the detailed events of 1897; this is particularly true in the case of Esmé Collings and the Brighton School. I understand that eventually Mr Barnes intends to publish a summary volume which will presumably be able to follow themes and personalities through with greater coherence.

Barnes' first volume was criticised for overemphasising the work of R. W. Paul at the expense of Birt Acres. In the present volume he chronicles Paul's continuing success and Acres' decline. In my opinion this serves to

strengthen the entire case for Paul. But Barnes, unfortunately, will rather encourage the Acres supporters with an uncharacteristic piece of surmise: he suggests that Acres suppressed a published reproduction of frames from his films. Such conjecture will not help the case for Paul, which is of itself a strong one.

Surmise of another kind is virtually absent from the book. In the early years of the cinema, predictions of its future and suggestions of what it could be used for were common. While Barnes documents some of the actual scientific uses to which cinema was put, he doesn't mention the wilder speculations in the photographic press of that year. These, however, are minor criticisms of an important contribution to the early history of the cinema; and the book, unlike its predecessor, is well produced and illustrated.

STEPHEN BOTTMORE

Burbanking

THE WARNER BROTHERS

by Michael Freedland
Harrap/£8.95

A NEW DEAL IN ENTERTAINMENT Warner Brothers in the 1930s by Nick Roddick BFI/£6.95

Seventeen years ago, when I set about writing a group portrait of the creators of Hollywood, there was a single reputable biography of a movie mogul (Louis B. Mayer) and one reliable studio history (MGM)—both by the same author, Bosley Crowther. Now there is a wall of such books (including separate studies of Monogram's Westerns and their crime films). The inspiring saga of how the sons of Polish immigrant cobbler Ben Warner set out from a Pennsylvania steel-town with a tattered copy of *The Great Train Robbery* on a journey that took them West to realise a Californian dream is now as familiar as the story of jazz moving north up the Mississippi from New Orleans at much the same time.

Michael Freedland rehearses the whole family history from Polish Pale to Beverly Hills enclave, focusing on the four brothers' role in creating the Warner Bros studio, and especially upon the youngest, Jack L. Warner, who from the 1920s until the 1960s was in charge of production in Hollywood. He has not, however, managed to discover what the family's original name was. According to Jack Warner Jr, his



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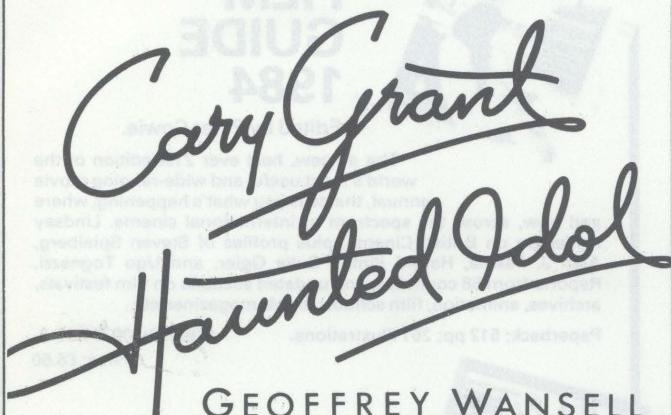
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BOOK REVIEWS

grandmother had forgotten it.

Freedland's literary education appears to have stopped short of the paragraph and his careless book is full of tedious errors. He cannot spell 'Ku Klux Klan', gets the facts of the Arbuckle case wrong, mangles the plot of *Hollywood Canteen* and ruins the punch-line of the famous story about Jack Warner allowing William Faulkner to write at home by locating the Mississippi author's home in South Carolina. He neglects several important matters. But essentially he gets the overall story right, letting history bubble messily along. And in not attempting to iron out contradictions in the mean, generous, flashy, conservative, prim, womanising, assimilated, deeply Jewish, philistine, clownish, suave character of Jack Warner, Freedland presents a convincing portrait of the man behind the studio's badgelike logo.

The greatest Warner Brothers films were possibly made in the 50s—*The Searchers*, *Rio Bravo*, the James Dean trilogy among them. But the crucial period of the archetypal Warner movie was the fifteen years from the coming of sound until the mid-40s when two great producers superintended the studio's fortunes—Darryl F. Zanuck and Hal B. Wallis. Zanuck devised the policy of 'snatching stories from the headlines' and launched the cycle of 'social conscience' movies, before falling out with the tight-fisted Warners over a general studio pay cut and leaving in 1933 to start his own Twentieth Century company. Wallis began his career in the Warner publicity department, masterminding the campaign that accompanied the studio's introduction of sound. He became a producer in 1930, assumed a dominant position after Zanuck's departure, and left in 1944, following the bizarre behaviour at the 1943 Academy Award ceremonies of Jack Warner, who beat Wallis to the rostrum to collect the 'best picture' Oscar for *Casablanca*.

In a scrupulous study that apparently originated in a graduate thesis embarked upon at Manchester University, Nick Roddick concentrates on the twelve years at Warner Brothers between the Wall Street Crash and Pearl Harbor. Unlike Freedland's totally unbuttressed text, Roddick provides pages of references, a detailed filmography, appendices of first-release engagements, a bibliography and, to accompany a most valuable casebook on the making of *Anthony Adverse*, a facsimile page of a Daily Production and Progress Report.

Roddick chose Warner Brothers as a way of looking at the big studio system because of the pre-war Hollywood 'Big Five' it was the one that for a variety of

reasons responded most readily to its times with crime movies, backstage musicals (his title 'A New Deal in Entertainment' was the publicity slogan for *42nd Street*), social conscience pictures about unemployment, the unions, racial intolerance, injustice, etc, and its inspirational biopics. He relates the studio's performance closely to the politics of the era, and could well have borrowed for the grouping of movies the titles used by the Washington movie buff Arthur Schlesinger Jr for the three volumes of his *Age of Roosevelt*—'The Crisis of the Old Order', 'The Coming of the New Deal' and 'The Politics of Upheaval'. Surprisingly Roddick makes no reference to the 1975 David Putnam-Philippe Mora documentary *Brother Can You Spare a Dime*, which uses clips from Warner Brothers features and newsreel footage to interweave the careers of James Cagney and Franklin Roosevelt as the emblematic Americans of the decade.

Roddick plays down the role of both studio boss and auteur director. The Warner Brothers themselves figure scarcely at all—Harry crops up with an illiterate memo worrying over 'censure trouble' threatened by *Angels with Dirty Faces*; Jack Warner surfaces in a tautologically hectoring memo about publicity for *Sergeant York*. Although he notes the significant difference between Zanuck's socially contextualised *Public Enemy* and Hal Wallis' mythic *Little Caesar*, Roddick does insufficient justice to Zanuck. For him Wallis is the Monroe Stahr of Warners and 'the 1930s were the Wallis years', he boldly states.

He is not the first to note the importance of Wallis. In an essay on 'The Showman Producer' in *The Cinema 1951*, a short-lived Pelican annual, Karel Reisz argued that Wallis' work showed a greater consistency of quality and theme than did that of the directors he employed. Moreover, Roddick might profitably have compared the films Zanuck and Wallis produced after leaving Warners—the latter never put his name to anything resembling *The Grapes of Wrath*, *Gentleman's Agreement* or *Pinky*.

Nevertheless he has written a book that is closely argued in relation to specific films and groups of films, and richly suggestive about the nature of studio production. Of his four most interesting discoveries—*The Hatchet Man* (1932), *Blessed Event* (1932), *Massacre* (1934) and *The World Changes* (1934)—sadly only the first was shown in his National Film Theatre season last summer.

Perhaps the author's 1980s sensibility leads him too easily to think it curious that the Warner

product at its most acutely critical should still express a belief in America as a fundamentally just society. After all, the slogan of the American Communist Party at that time was 'Communism is 20th Century Americanism'. But unlike many young film historians he does not mock film-makers or contemporary critics from hindsight. Indeed his thesis about the way Warner Brothers handled controversial subjects, that is summed up in the concluding chapter called 'The Burbank of America', comes from a perceptive review of the 1935 Paul Muni film *Black Fury* in *Variety*: 'Disturbing chiefly by inference, possibly left-wing radical innuendo, canny Burbanking evidences studio wisdom in pruning, motivating and editing

in just the right degrees.'

In approaching his subject Rodick appears to have had before him the words that Scott Fitzgerald typed out as a working guide to preparing *The Last Tycoon*: 'Don't give the impression that these are bad men.' And in a very just, generous book he doesn't, though he is aware of his own ambiguous relationship to the products he is discussing: 'It is only since the 1930s that we have got used to—though we may not always know how to cope with—the ways in which our inner lives ... are strongly influenced, and at times almost controlled, by another industry. And an industry which is, moreover, geared precisely if not explicitly to doing that.'

PHILIP FRENCH

LETTERS

Middletown

SIR,—As one of three academics who went to film-maker Peter Davis with the idea which became the *Middletown* series, I wish to respond to several of the points Brian Winston discusses in his interesting article, 'Hell of a good sail ... sorry, no whales' (SIGHT AND SOUND, Autumn 1983).

Although certain segments of *Middletown* may appear to be 're-runs' of earlier Direct Cinema films, I can assure Mr Winston that *Middletown* included segments on politics, religion, work, etc (and indeed was a six-part series) largely because Robert and Helen Lynd decided to study Muncie, Indiana, from these same six perspectives in the mid-1920s and, of course, again in the mid-1930s. (For the record, the first *Middletown* book was published in 1929, not 1928, as Mr Winston has it.)

The selection of *Middletown* as the title for the series was basically our decision; it had little to do with Peter Davis. We presented him with an idea which we believed that he and his associates could translate into a series with an acceptable socio-historical base. From that perspective, as Mr Winston quite accurately points out, we were not terribly successful.

Mr Winston makes far too much of the Xerox Corporation's role in this project. Granted they did give us \$500,000 (out of a nearly \$3m budget), but to refer to Xerox as 'the series underwriter' when the National Endowment for the Humanities provided most of our funding seems to be an attempt to set up Xerox as some kind of American corporate villain.

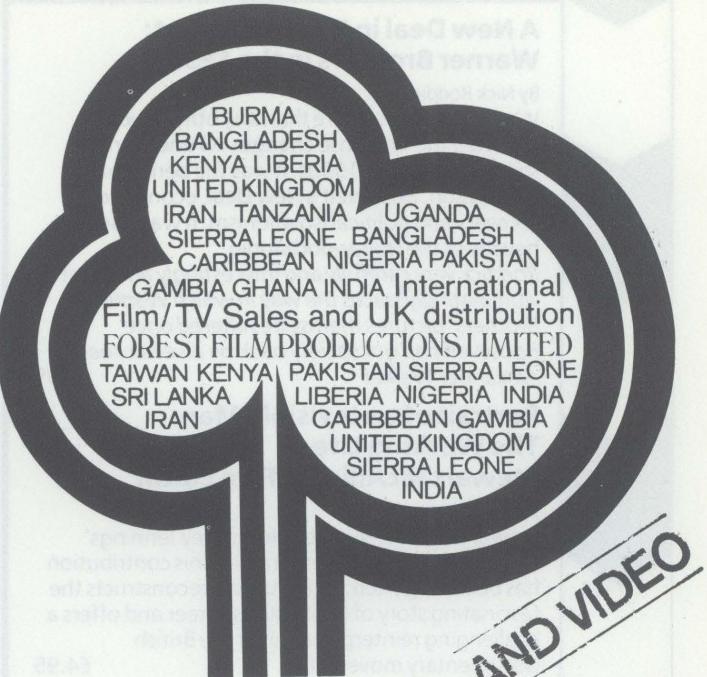
Mr Winston correctly notes the atypicality of many of the people

who figure prominently in several of the segments. At least two of the three academics spoke at great length with Davis, Leacock, et al about this problem ... without success. However, in all fairness, I am certain that Mr Davis and the directors of the films do not share my view or that of Mr Winston.

I agree with Mr Winston that film-makers and academics should have spent time together to discuss the implications, as well as the ramifications of making a series called *Middletown*. Indeed, the original funding proposal to the National Endowment said that such conferences would take place. However, as far as requiring that film-makers read *Middletown* (we, of course, assumed that they would!), I can only note that some did and some did not.

I do not think that the *Middletown* topics were haphazardly researched. Rather it was what happened to the research once it got into the hands of film-makers and editors. To be blunt, there are some real horror stories to be told on this general topic. Sometimes this kind of collaboration between academics and film-makers can work. However, in *Middletown*, it obviously could have worked much better.

In the case of 'the banned episode *Seventeen*', Mr Winston errs when he fails to mention the crucial role played by Muncie's public broadcasting station and the attorneys for this station, the local school corporation and the parents of several of the young people in the film in keeping *Seventeen* from being shown in April 1982. And here too Mr Winston brings Xerox into a setting where the corporation does not really belong, at least not to the extent that Mr Winston would have your readers believe. Mr Davis pulled



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A New Deal in Entertainment: Warner Brothers in the 1930s

By Nick Roddick

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LETTERS

this film from the PBS schedule in April 1982. Xerox had decided to withdraw its corporate support as early as January of that year, a decision which was based far more on language than on *Seventeen's* black boy-white girl relationship. Finally, to insert the comment that '... one sequence (in *Seventeen*) could have been "cleaned up" for transmission' is to miss completely one side of this controversy. In April 1982, Mr Davis, Joel De Mott and Jeff Kreines agreed that there would be absolutely no changes in *Seventeen* to enable it to be shown at that time. From the vantage point of autumn 1983 and *Seventeen's* still-not-shown-in-the-US status, that may have been a shortsighted decision, at least in the view of film-makers who wish to have their work screened and discussed by the widest possible audience.

I again wish to commend Mr Winston for his incisive comments. He has certainly given me renewed confidence that Direct Cinema can be done within an acceptable socio-historical context. For a quite different perspective on *Middletown*, I refer readers to my essay, 'The Middletown Film Project: Reflections of an "Academic Humanist"', *Journal of Popular Film and Television* (Autumn 1982).

Yours faithfully,
WARREN VANDER HILL
Professor of History
Ball State University
Muncie, Indiana

The Ploughman's Lunch

SIR,—The past two issues of SIGHT AND SOUND have rightly had much to say about *The Ploughman's Lunch*. I feel, however, that most of this discussion, while very helpful and illuminating, fails to address itself to the film's fundamental obsession, class hatred. *The Ploughman's Lunch* is an uncompromising attack on a lower middle class boy who wants to make good, and the assault is carried out with some of the ugliest snobbery ever to find cinematic expression.

It is worthwhile noting that the question of James' background was something of a 'problem' for McEwan and Eyre. The scenes showing James with his mother and father were introduced simply to identify 'where he came from'. But for McEwan to assert this is to mystify more than it clarifies. If we look at the film, these 'background' scenes do more than tell us that he was born to certain parents, grew up in a certain house, and was subjected to certain economic conditions; they serve a rhetorical function, and work to destroy whatever sympathy we may have for James, a man who not only denies his parents to his friends, a perhaps

pardonable adolescent sin, but denies his parents to himself, refusing to comfort his dying mother, ignoring his grieving father, and seemingly hurrying them both into the grave.

One of the film's achievements is, I think, the subtle realism with which James' character is delineated, but this achievement is compromised by McEwan and Eyre's utter lack of feeling, the same sort of juvenile emotional poverty that they so meticulously diagnose in James. Indeed, the whole film stands as a kind of exercise in narcissism.

On a lower level, though, the film is simply guilty of making too much of too little. McEwan explains, 'It's the sort of half-lie, the sliding truth, the change of register when you talk to one person and then another. So although they are moral monsters, they're a quite common breed.' The difficulty here, and in the film, is the sudden leap from the apparently trivial, 'the change of registers', to the thoroughly damning, 'the moral monsters', and the association with class, the reference to the 'common breed'. Certainly James' social duplicity is less monstrous than pathetic, the turns of a mere worm. And likewise James' sensitivity about his origins, his vulnerability, makes him pitiable rather than damnable.

Finally, what is monstrous about the film is its silly psychologising of the Falklands conflict, the suggestion that micro-events like James' furtive glance at his watch during his mother's funeral, and all the personal inadequacies that implies, in a way explain, or could be seen as even remotely responsible for the conflict with Argentina, the macro-event that was the South Atlantic. The distance is bridged, I would submit, by pretension rather than analysis and understanding, and the weaknesses of the entire structure are masked by an unacceptable play upon powerful, but ignoble, British sentiments.

Yours faithfully,
ALAN MADSEN
London N1

Madame Tolstoy

SIR,—John Pym ('Madame Tolstoy and the Axeman', SIGHT AND SOUND, Autumn 1983) recalls 'a fragment of film' showing Sonya Tolstoy, in pursuit of the husband who had fled from her, entering 'the room where Tolstoy was confined' and then wonders 'What passed between her and the vexed dying novelist? ... The spectator's curiosity had been perpetually aroused.'

His memory is faulty. The world quickly learned of the great man's flight. Mr Pathé cabled his cameraman, Meyer: 'Take station, try to get close-up, station name.

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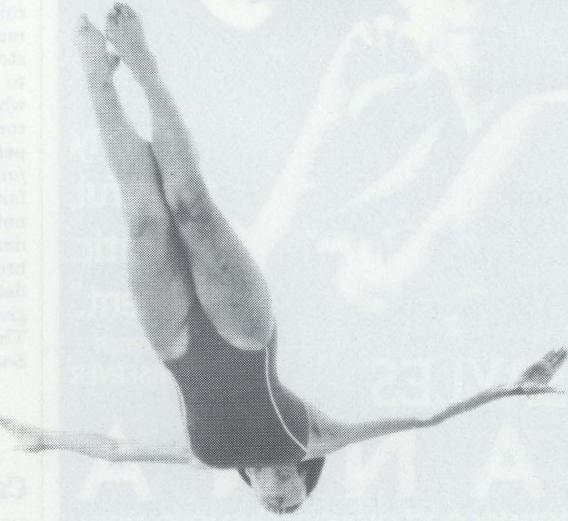
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LETTERS

Take family, well-known figures, car they are sleeping in... Soon there were several railroad cars full of press, photographers and cameramen packing Astapovo railway station. So we have the marvellous footage of Mme Tolstoy walking along the platform to the stationmaster's cottage, where Leo Tolstoy lay dying surrounded by those who hated her, peering through the window and failing to gain entry. Doctors and family had agreed that she should not see her dying husband. In the dark hours two days later she was brought by her sons to the writer's deathbed and knelt crying 'Forgive me, forgive me.' Too late. The final door had closed on Sonya.

Yours faithfully,
RONALD GRAY
London SW19

Cabiria

SIR,—I find John Francis Lane's notes on *Cabiria* (SIGHT AND SOUND, Autumn 1983) of considerable interest in view of the fact that I helped to present the film at the National Film Theatre in 1954. I do not entirely agree with him about the lengthy titles for in style they are an integral part of the film, capturing its mood and blending uniquely with the visual action. In no way can they be compared to the stuffy pedantic titling in the Griffith films. In cohesion and style it is one of the great films, with or without the benefit of Pizzetti.

The scene is set in its opening title: 'It is evening. Already the toil of the shepherds comes to an end, and the Doric muse inspires the wax-bound flutes, fragrant with the scent of honey. Battó leaves the fields and returns to his Catanian home from whose garden may be seen the slopes of Etna.' The rhythm of the titles changes with the dramatic nature of the scenes as in the eruption of Etna sequence. The final title evokes the epic grandeur as do those which precede it: 'Who shall sing of the Punic Wars? Who shall remember Capua and Metaurus? Utica and Zama? I was not conquered by the cavalry, nor by the infantry, nor by the ships, but by the newest force which flashed its rays from your eyes.' My favourite title is that in which Sophonisa's servant describes Massinissa: 'He is like the wind from the desert bringing the scent of dust and lions and the message of Astarte.' Few modern heroes have had such a build-up.

The beautiful camerawork of Segundo de Chomón with its delicate and imperceptible use of the moving camera to bring variety to the composition, the fabulous sets and the visual scope of the film do not in any way overwhelm the human story, which proceeds through the epic sweep of history.

The Hymn to Moloch is quite extraordinary in its effect. It is as if a sound film was trying to break through in the way the choir of priests is photographed. You almost hear the voices.

The version we showed in 1954 was a copy borrowed from an Italian archive. With the help of the London correspondent of the *Corriere della Sera* we got a literal translation of the titles to which I endeavoured to give the poetic feeling of the original. They were read out over the microphone blending in with the late Arthur Dulay's sympathetic accompaniment. Perhaps it was an advantage to present the titles in this way. Arthur, who could rise to the occasion when deeply moved by a film (witness *Broken Blossoms* and *Jeanne d'Arc*) enjoyed playing for this film. I remember his delight (as I remember him) when the film was over and he said to me, 'That was a great performance we gave tonight.'

Yours faithfully,
LIAM O'LEARY
Dublin 6

Where Watts

SIR,—With reference to Gilbert Adair's 'Un, deux, trois' (SIGHT AND SOUND, Summer 1983), the 'Watts Tower in downtown Los Angeles' is, in fact, a group of towers and the Watts district is in no sense part of the downtown area, even given the existence of the freeway.

Yours faithfully,
GRAHAME SMITH
Zomba, Malawi

Olwen Vaughan

SIR,—In the many recent self-congratulatory articles and speeches (Guildhall, etc), attendant on the BFI's 50th Anniversary, I seem to have missed mention of Olwen Vaughan, the Institute's General Secretary 1935–1945.

On her death in 1973 a group of her friends, among them Basil Wright, Edgar Anstey and myself, were called upon to suggest some form of commemoration to the contribution that she had made to those formative years of the BFI. It was decided that Eve Fisher's striking portrait of Olwen which had previously graced her beloved 'Petit Club Français' be presented to the Institute, to be permanently hung in a suitable place. For a while this was so, and the portrait was conspicuous on the wall alongside the bar at the National Film Theatre. However after a while it disappeared, and an enquiry I made to the Controller of the NFT met with no response. In turn Basil Wright was however informed by Mr Hardcastle that removal was only temporary during certain and soon to be completed structural refurbishment. Since then, how-

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ever, time has marched on quite a bit, and still no picture.

May I therefore seek reassurance that this portrait of someone who in her day did so much for the BFI and—with her New London Film Society both before and after the war—film appreciation in general long before the NFT itself came into existence, will soon once again be on permanent and appropriate display.

Yours faithfully,
PETER HOPKINSON
London SE21

We have been assured that the portrait of Olwen Vaughan will soon be on display again at the NFT.—EDITOR

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

BOB BAKER is editor of *Film Dope*... JOHN BROWN is Assistant Director of the Scottish Film Council and secretary to the Scottish Film Production Fund; his television play *Comes with the Territory* is to be shown on BBC2 in 1984... MIKE BYGRAVE is a freelance journalist at present

based in Los Angeles... THOMAS ELSAESSER teaches English and film at the University of East Anglia... ROBERT MURPHY is a freelance writer and is working on a PhD thesis on the economic history of the British film industry in the 1930s and 40s... GUY PHELPS, author of *Film Censorship* and sometime exhibitor at Tyneside and the Ipswich Film Theatre, is now engaged on a project about film-making in Britain... BIBEKANANDA RAY is an editor at the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting in New Delhi... ANDREW ROBINSON has a special interest in Indian films and is currently at work on a biography of Satyajit Ray... ALEXANDER SESONSKE teaches film at the University of California, Santa Barbara... CHARLES W. SMITH, 3D consultant and cameraman, is Technical Director of Stereo Image Techniques... TONY WILLIAMS has published interviews with film-makers including Michael Powell, and teaches film in Manchester University's Department of Extra-Mural Studies.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

COLUMBIA-EMI-WARNER for *First Blood*, *Best Friends*, *Tootsie*, *It's Alive*, *The Right Stuff*.
ITC for *Q—The Winged Serpent*, *Privileged*.

RANK FILM DISTRIBUTORS for *Educating Rita*.

20th CENTURY-FOX for *Return of the Jedi*, *Local Hero*, *Daniel*, *UIP* for *Missing*, *Diner*, *Resurrection*, *Isadora*, *Melvin and Howard*, *American Graffiti*, *Rear Window*.

ARTIFICIAL EYE for *Vivement Dimanche!*, *Prénom Carmen*, *The Colour of Pomegranates*.

BLUE DOLPHIN for *Barbarosa*.

CONTEMPORARY FILMS for *In the White City*, photograph of Alain Tanner.

MAINLINE PICTURES for *The Private Files of J. Edgar Hoover*. VIRGIN FILMS for *Can She Bake a Cherry Pie?*

MGM for *Brigadoon*.

UNIVERSAL PICTURES for photograph of Ned Tanen.

MERCHANT IVORY PRODUCTIONS for *The Bostonians*.

NICK J. MILETI PRODUCTION/UA CLASSICS for *Streamers*.

LA PRODUCTION DU TIGRE for *High Seas*.

EVERLIN FILMS/MURRAY GRIGOR/ CHANNEL 4 for *Scotch Myths—the Movie*.

LOOSEYARD/ZDF/CHANNEL 4 for *Ghost Dance*.

LEGION PRODUCTIONS/CHANNEL 4 for *Living Apart Together*.

MAYA FILMS/CHANNEL 4 for *Hero*. PORTMAN PRODUCTIONS/CHANNEL 4 for *Ill Fares the Land*.

CENTRAL PRODUCTIONS/ MOSTPOINT/CHANNEL 4 for *Meantime*.

GRANADA TELEVISION for *The Jewel in the Crown*.

THAMES TELEVISION for *Saigon—Year of the Cat*.

GREEK FILM CENTRE for *Revenge*, *When the Greeks Remetiko*, *Love Wanders in the Night*.

ROH/CLIVE BARDA for *Boris Godunov*.

ALEXANDER SESONSKE for *Lenin in October*.

CAROLE MYER for photograph of herself.

LARRY COHEN for photograph of himself.

CAROLYN JOHNS for photograph of Romaine Hart.

BFI/STEN M. ROSENBLUND for Guildhall banquet photograph.

BFI/SIMON JOHNSON for photograph of Barbara Stone.

BIBEKANANDA RAY for drawings and illustrations by Satyajit Ray.

NFA STILLS COLLECTION for *Greed*, *The Maggie*, photographs of cinemas, photographs of George Cukor, Joan Hackett, Ralph Richardson.

PRINTED BY Brown Knight and Truscott Ltd., London and Tonbridge, England.

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION RATES.
(4 issues) £6.15 including postage. Back issues £1.55 including postage and packing. U.S.A. \$14.00. Price per copy in United States \$3.50. Back issues \$3.50.

Binders to hold two years' issues £4.75, postage included (\$10.50).

SOLE AGENTS FOR U.S.A.: Eastern News Distributors, 111 Eighth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10011.
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ON NOW

OLIANNA (Mainline)

Pursuing his slightly puzzling career as an independent who makes mainstream-looking movies, John Sayles here tackles the (for a man) potentially dangerous subject of a woman who leaves her husband for another woman, finds herself being just as possessive of her lover as any jealous husband, and gradually grows into and adapts to her newly won freedom. The setting—an East Coast college town—sometimes makes the film a little cosy (liberal intellectuals who talk a better game than they play are easy targets), but Sayles treats the main theme with such matter-of-fact sensitivity that one feels neither a voyeur nor on the receiving end of special pleading. A small but impressive achievement. (Linda Griffiths, Jana Hallaren.)

THE MOON IN THE GUTTER (Palace)

Pretty much the same amalgam of thriller, fairytale and romance as in *Diva*, only this time the blend—with romance headily predominant—doesn't quite take. The dreamer from the dockland dives sits swilling beer in the family backyard, a moonlit treasure trove of crumbling relics so Tennessee Williams that you can almost scent the magnolia blossom; a crimson sports car glides to a halt by the gateway, temptingly poised against the aquamarine sea of an apéritif poster urging 'Try Another World' as the enigmatic beauty slumming from across the tracks turns her head and smiles. If this strikes you as pretentious, so be it: you're in good company since the film was slaughtered at Cannes. But Jean-Jacques Beineix shares something of the early Godard's sheer, sensuous pleasure in the act of film-making, and this shines exhilaratingly through his incredible images, mostly beautiful, occasionally bathetic, but always reaching passionately for a moment of cinema. His failure here, if failure it be, is extraordinarily sympathetic in its attempt to recreate the gutter lyricism that made David Goodis the poet of the *série noire*. (Gérard Depardieu, Nastassja Kinski.)

AT FIRST SIGHT (Gala)

Generally sensitive study of two women who meet up in the 1950s, find an emotional bond and leave their husbands for a freer life. Well observed domestic backgrounds, nice playing from Isabelle Huppert and Miou-

Miou, but the men are too schematically used. Directed by Diane Kurys, based on her mother's life, and a kind of prequel to *Diabolo Menthe*.

BLOODY KIDS (Palace)

Saturday night fever, Southend style, as envisaged by a Stephen Poliakoff script about two eleven-year-olds who stage a fake accident in order to relieve the subtopian monotony. Made in 1979, arrestingly shot by Chris Menges, and often gripping, although the subjective viewpoint is not quite satisfactorily maintained. (Richard Thomas, Peter Clark, Derrick O'Connor; director, Stephen Frears.)

BLOW TO THE HEART (The Other Cinema)

An elegantly controlled study of terrorism and the family from acclaimed Italian TV director Gianni Amelio. With roles reversed (it's the son who suspects his father, played by Jean-Louis Trintignant, of involvement in terrorist activities), the film is actually more about family uncertainties and tensions; the latter are as 'unspeakable' as a bomb outrage. (Fausto Rossi, Laura Morante.)

BRAINSTORM (UIP)

Douglas Trumbull disappears beneath his technological artefacts in a yarn about a machine that records emotions and sensations so that others can relive them through playback. The experiences this offers (from romantic love to the mystery of death) are paralysingly commonplace, and the thriller aspects (the military see it as a psychological weapon) remarkably silly. (Christopher Walken, Natalie Wood, Cliff Robertson.)

CARMEN (Cinerama)

Flamenco ballet based on Bizet and Mérimée, and a continuation of Carlos Saura's experiments in choreography for the camera. Fabulous colour; simple, evocative staging; and a range of rhythmic camera movements which place the dancing in the Minnelli class. A pity that the laid-on equivalent of the Carmen story is rather laboured. (Antonio Gades, Laura del Sol, Paco de Lucia.)

CUJO (ITC)

Stephen King's rather ponderous novel has been honed down into a pleasingly tight and schematic horror film. A wife's adultery provokes a crisis in her family, which is then made flesh in the form of an oversized and terminally rabid St Bernard. Director Lewis Teague (*The Lady in Red*, *Alligator*) finally proves himself without the support of a John Sayles script. (Dee Wallace, Daniel Hugh-Kelly, Danny Pintauro.)

FORBIDDEN RELATIONS (Cinegate)

Incestuous love affair in a Hungarian village brings the couple up against a stern but not venal authority, yet their love keeps them going. Magyar *amour fou* given a sensitive, finally rather bland treatment but some

of the playing soars, especially Lili Monori as the determined, obsessed girl. (Mari Töröcsik, Miklós Székely; director, Zsolt Kézdi Kovács.)

GORKY PARK (Rank)

Dennis Potter has scaled down and Michael Apted rendered smoothly anodyne Martin Cruz Smith's driving, confidently grand-scale thriller. Lee Marvin is the groomed US furrier; William Hurt the bruised Moscow cop; Joanna Pacula the soulfully impassioned love interest in between: every man in his stereotype.

THE HONORARY CONSUL (Fox)

A grey visit to Greeneland and some very old friends: exhausted passion, moral betrayal and relics of religious faith. Set in an Argentinian backwater, it fringes parody as the Hon British Consul broods on his whisky bottle, the ladykilling doctor on his inability to love, and the Paraguayan guerrilla on his lapsed priesthood. Good performances but stock televisual direction. (Michael Caine, Richard Gere, Bob Hoskins; director, John MacKenzie.)

JAWS 3D (UIP)

Chief Brody's kids are big enough now to take on the giant fish without any help from their Dad. Top-of-the-range 3D combines with bottom-of-the-barrel plot to produce a chunk of gloriously absurd spectacle, mercifully short on gore and quite high on entertainment. (Dennis Quaid, Bess Armstrong, Simon MacCorkindale; director, Joe Alves.)

KING BLANK (BFI)

A remarkable first feature from Michael Oblowitz, in which a desperate couple take a short cut to destruction through the motel rooms, bars and highways around Kennedy Airport. Superb black and white photography (the film seems to take place in its very own twilight zone), a densely woven soundtrack, and an abrasive sense of humour. (Ron Vawter, Rosemary Hothschild.)

KRULL

(Columbia-EMI-Warner)

Peter Yates' long-awaited saga of the planet Krull has its heart in the right place, but the resulting film hovers uneasily between character study and sword-and-sorcery epic. The effects are nice, the performances fair, but it's not really thrilling enough to be a blockbuster and not tight enough to be anything else. (Freddie Jones, Francesca Annis, Ken Marshall, Lysette Anthony.)

LIQUID SKY (Virgin)

An amorphous extra-terrestrial in a tiny flying saucer casts a murderous psychedelic eye on some unsavoury specimens of the New York demimonde: intermittently engaging, but the glazed fascination of the makers (Russian expatriates) with 'new wave' disco culture is not catching. (Anne Carlisle; director, Slava Tsukerman.)

NEVER CRY WOLF (Disney)

This handsome wilderness saga—dogged young scientist is dumped in the Canadian north to study the habits of wolves—is burdened with Inuit philosophising and some black and white caricatures. The wolves remain dignified and aloof. (Charles Martin Smith; director, Carroll Ballard.)

NEVER SAY NEVER AGAIN (Columbia-EMI-Warner)

Proving that Bond movies don't have to be all stunts and schoolboy innuendo, Connery returns on triumphant form in a remake of *Thunderball*, with intelligent script and direction (Lorenzo Semple Jnr and Irvin Kershner), stunts that thrill without overkill and, in general, two and a bit hours of largely unadulterated fun. (Barbara Carrera, Kim Basinger, Klaus Maria Brandauer.)

ORDER OF DEATH (Virgin)

An Italian hommage thriller, shot in New York (exteriors) and Rome (interiors), with a powerfully manic Harvey Keitel and John Lydon (a studied non-performance). Robert Faenza's tale of cop killers and identity changes is spare, stylish and a little short on real content.

THE TOY

(Columbia-EMI-Warner)

Weirdly misconceived comic fantasy with Richard Pryor bringing sentimental enlightenment into the domain of bigoted tycoon Jackie Gleason after being hired as nursery playmate for his obnoxious brat of a son. Tasteless in implication, flavourless in execution. (Ned Beatty; director, Richard Donner.)

LA TRAVIATA (ITC)

Franco Zeffirelli's version of the Verdi warhorse offers a night at the opera rather than at the cinema. And very effective, too, with decors so opulent as on occasion to resemble a three-ring circus, a ripe, confident reading of the score by James Levine, and two gloriously moving presences in Teresa Stratas and Plácido Domingo.

VIDEODROME (Palace)

David Cronenberg's exploration of the video future (the surgical implantation of living cassettes) has already achieved a degree of notoriety. It proves to be almost as incoherent as it is speculative, with James Woods tracking down the mysterious source of some hardcore pornography, only to end up generating the material himself. The plot doesn't really hold down the ideas, but the film is none the worse for that. (Deborah Harry.)

WE OF THE NEVER NEVER (Mainline)

A year in the life of a remote Australian cattle station at the turn of the century. Persuasive period details, landscape and distance impressively evoked, but the foreground drama tends to be facile and slow-moving. (Angela Punch McGregor, Arthur Dignam; director, Igor Auzins.)

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